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Belle-Rose

BY

Amédée Achard



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BELLE-ROSE.

By AMÉDÉE ACHARD.

To
GEORGE SAINTSBURY
WHOSE KNOWLEDGE OF THE FRENCH LANGUAGE
AND LITERATURE IS SURPASSED BY THAT OF
NO OTHER LIVING ENGLISHMAN
THIS TRANSLATION IS RESPECTFULLY DEDICATED.

BELLE-ROSE.

A ROMANCE OF THE CLOAK AND SWORD

BY

AMÉDÉE ACHARD.

TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH

BY

WILLIAM HALE.

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BELLE-ROSE.

CHAPTER I.

THE FALCONER'S SON.

There was, about the year 1663, at some hundred steps from St. Omer, a well-built cottage, whose door opened upon the main road to Paris. A live hedge of hawthorn and of elder surrounded a garden in which were to be seen, confusedly mixed, flowers, goats, and children. Half a dozen hens, with their young broods, cackled in a corner between the cabbages and strawberries; two or three hives, grouped under some peach trees, turned to the sun their sweet-smelling cones filled with humming bees, and here and there, upon the branches of pear trees, weighed down with fruit, cooed some beautiful pigeon which fluttered around its mate.

The cottage had a fresh and smiling aspect which made glad the heart; grape and hop-vines covered its walls; seven or eight windows, irregularly placed, seemed to look at the landscape in a good-natured fashion; a slender thread of smoke trembled at the top of the chimney, where hung the flexible stems of the wall-wort, and at whatever hour of the day you passed before the house, you heard the joyous cries of children and the crowing of cocks. Among these children who came there from all parts of the faubourg, there were three who belonged to Guillaume Grinedal, the master of the house—Jacques, Claudine, and Pierre.

Guillaume Grinedal, or Pere Guillaume, as he was familiarly called, was indeed the best falconer in all Artois; but for a long time he had had no occasion to make use of his knowledge. During the regency of Queen Anne, of Austria, Monsieur d'Assonville, his master, ruined by the wars, had been forced to sell his lands; but, before leaving the country, wishing to reward the fidelity of his old servitor, he had made him a present of the cottage and the garden. The old Grinedal, refusing to serve new mas-

ters, had retired to this habitation, where he lived on the fruits of occasional work and on his savings. Become a widower, Pere Guillaume no longer thought of anything but his children, whom he raised as well as his means permitted him and the most honestly in the world. So long as they were small, the children lived as free as butterflies, rolling in the grass in summer, skating upon the ice in winter, and running with heads bared to the sun, through the rain or through the wind. Then came the time for study, which consisted in reading in a great book upon the knees of Pere Grinedal, and in writing upon a slate, all of which, however, did not prevent them from finding leisure to gather strawberries in the woods and crawfish in the streams.

Jacques, the oldest one of the lot, was, at seventeen or eighteen, a great fellow who appeared to be over twenty. He was not a fine conversationalist, but he acted with an extreme boldness and resolution as soon as he believed himself to be in the right. His strength made him dreaded by all the scholars of the district, while his upright character made him loved to an equal extent. He was chosen as judge in all the children's quarrels; Jacques rendered his decree, supported it if need be with some trenchant blows, and everybody went away pleased. When there was a dispute and battles for cherries or some German toy, the arrival of Jacques made the boldest silent and gave courage to the weaker ones; Jacques parted the combatants, questioned them as to the causes of the debate, distributed advice to some, a thump on the head to others, adjudicated the matter in litigation, and put each of them in accord by a game of nine-pins.

It happened at times that he addressed himself to those larger and stronger than he; but the fear of being beaten did not stop him. Ten times thrown to the ground, he arose ten times; conquered the evening before, he began again the next day, and such was the power of his courage, supported by the sentiment of justice innate in him, that he always ended by being victorious. But this determined fellow, who would not have recoiled before ten of the king's gendarmes, grew troubled and stammered before a little girl who might well be four years younger than himself. The presence of Mademoiselle Suzanne de Malzonvilliers was sufficient to stop him in the midst of his most violent exercises. As soon as he perceived her he descended from the tops of the poplars where he was robbing the nests of some magpies, released the arm of the

mischievous urchin whom he was about to chastise, or let go the bull with whom he was struggling. All the young lady had to do was to make an imperceptible sign of her finger, give him a significant glance, to make Jacques run to her side, blushing and confused.

Mademoiselle de Malzonvilliers' father was a rich farmer of the revenue who had taken advantage of the times of the Fronde to make a fortune, while so many others, on the contrary, were ruined by that troublous period. He had not always called himself by the brilliant name of Malzonvilliers, which was that of an estate in which he had invested the better part of his fortune; but, like a shrewd man, he had thought that he might, like other bourgeois of his acquaintance, barter the peasant name of his father for one which did honor to his crowns. Monsieur Dufailly had progressively become, and as the result of skillful transformations, at first Monsieur du Failly, then Monsieur du Failly de Malzonvilliers, then finally Monsieur de Malzonvilliers, quite short. At present he was only waiting for a favorable occasion to give himself the title of baron or chevalier. At the epoch when his affairs necessitated frequent journeys into the province, and oftentimes even as far as Paris, Monsieur de Malzonvilliers had many times confided the care of his possessions to Guillaume Grinedal, who passed for the most honest artisan in St. Omer. This confidence, which Monsieur de Malzonvilliers had never had occasion to regret, had established between the falconer and the farmer of revenue intimate and daily relations, which profited the three children, Jacques, Claudine, and Pierre. Suzanne, who was almost as old as Claudine, had masters of every kind, and the lessons served for all, so that the sons of Pere Guillaume soon knew more than half of the little bourgeois of St. Omer.

Jacques profited above all by this instruction; as he had a just and persevering mind, he puzzled over things until he had understood them. He was often to be met in the fields, bareheaded, feet incased in wooden shoes, and a book in his hand, and he never let go of it until he had thoroughly mastered it. One thing alone could turn him aside from this occupation—it was the pleasure which he enjoyed in seeing his father handle the old arms which were brought to him from the four corners of the town and from the chateaux in the neighborhood to be put in condition. Guillaume Grinedal was the best gunsmith in the canton; it was an art which he had learned in the time

when he was master of falconry at Monsieur d'Assonville's, and which would have brought him in much money if he had wished to exercise it in the hope of gain. But, in his profession, he acted like an artist, wishing no more than the just payment for his work, which he always estimated at a value below its real worth. Jacques often amused himself by assisting him, and when he had polished a halbert or some sword, he esteemed himself the happiest fellow in the country, provided, however, that Mademoiselle de Malzonvilliers gave him in the morning her daily smile. When Suzanne walked about the garden of the falconry in company with the children and the domestic animals which lived there on the best of terms, she offered to Jacques the strangest contrast imaginable. Jacques was large, strong, and vigorous. His black eyes, full of firmness and luster, shone under a forehead embrowned by the sun and loaded with thick curls of blonde hair. At the least gesture of his arms one understood that in a turn of the hand he would have pulled up a young tree by the roots or made an ox bend its hoofs; but at the least word from Suzanne, he blushed. Suzanne, on the contrary, had an exquisite delicacy of form and features; at fifteen she appeared to be scarcely twelve or thirteen years of age; her pale face, her slender form, her frail limbs indicated a nervous organization of an extreme delicacy. But the calm and radiant look of her great blue eyes, filled with life and intelligence, the clear and firm contour of her mouth, announced at the same time the resolution of an honest and courageous soul. She had the form of a child and the smile of a woman. When she happened to go to sleep in the shade of an oak, her head supported upon Jacques' shoulder, the poor fellow remained immovable so long as the sleep of his little friend lasted, and, in a mute contemplation, he admired the young and pure face which reposed upon his heart with such an innocent abandonment. When the young girl half opened her rosy and serious lips Jacques held his breath to hear better. His soul vibrated at the voice of Suzanne as does the branch of the willow at the least breath of wind, and at times he felt, while listening to her, tears mount to his eyelids—tears whose cause was unknown to him, but whose divine source was in his heart.

One day in the month of May, 1658, five years before the epoch at which this story begins, and a short time before the glorious battle of the Dunes, Jacques, who might then be thirteen or fourteen years of age, saw coming to him,

while he was promenading in a meadow at a short distance from St. Omer, an unknown man who was indifferently dressed. You would have taken him for some deserter, by his accouterment, which pertained as much to the civil as to the military state, if the stranger had not been deformed. One could not be a soldier with a hump on the shoulders, and Jacques thought he might be a peddler. The stranger followed a path traced by the marsh-gardeners between the vegetables, and mounted at times upon a hillock to look over the hedges at the country beyond. When he was close to Jacques he stopped and began to consider him for a moment. Jacques was leaning against an apple tree, his hands in his pockets and whistling between his teeth. After some minutes of reflection, the unknown walked toward him.

"Do you belong to this country, my boy?" he said to him.

"Yes, monsieur," replied Jacques.

If some one had asked Jacques why he had saluted him whom he took for a peddler with the name of monsieur, he would have found great difficulty in explaining it. The stranger had an air which awed Jacques, though the son of Guillaume Grinedal did not allow himself to be easily intimidated. He spoke, looked, and acted with an extreme simplicity, but in this simplicity there was more of nobility and pride than in all the importance of Monsieur de Malzonvilliers.

"If that is the case," said the unknown, "you can undoubtedly give me the name of some one able to make a long journey on horseback?"

"You have that same one before you, monsieur."

"You?"

"Myself."

"But, my little friend, you appear to me very young. Do you know that it is a question of galloping seven or eight leagues without drawing bridle?"

"Do not bother yourself about my age; only furnish me the horse, and you will see."

The stranger smiled; then he added:

"He is untractable and full of fire——"

"I have a good arm and a good eye; he can run——"

"Come, then; the horse is not far off."

The unknown and Jacques left the meadow and entered a little patch of woods. Just in the middle, behind a thicket, Jacques perceived a horse hitched to an elm. Jacques had never seen an animal so beautiful, even in

the stables of Monsieur de Malzonvilliers. He approached the horse, caressed its croup, unhitched it, and was getting ready to leap into the saddle, when the stranger softly placed a hand upon his shoulder.

"Before leaving," he said to him, "it is at least necessary for you to know where you are to go."

"That is true," replied Jacques, whose foot was already in the stirrup.

Impatience to gallop upon such a noble horse had made him forget the object of his trip.

"You doubtless know where the little village of Witternesse is situated?"

"Quite well—at a league, almost, to the right, in the direction of Aire."

"It is there you must go; now bear this well in mind: Before entering Witternesse you will see, to your left, a farm-house at the end of a rye field. It has four windows, and there is a weather-cock on the roof. You will give three knocks at the door; at the third one you will pronounce in a loud voice the name of Bergame; a man will come out, and you will hand him this paper."

Upon which the unknown drew from his pocket a small portfolio, took a pencil, and began to write.

"Do you know how to read?" he suddenly asked Jacques.

"Yes, monsieur; quite well."

The stranger contracted his eyebrows; but this movement was so rapid that Jacques did not have time to take notice of it. For a moment the stranger turned the pencil between his fingers; then taking a sudden resolution, he rapidly wrote some words, tore out the leaf of paper, and presenting it to Jacques, fixed upon the child a searching glance. Jacques examined the paper.

"I read, but I do not understand," said he.

The stranger smiled.

"It is not necessary for you to understand," he replied; "slip the paper in your pocket and mount your horse. Good! Parbleau, my boy, you carry yourself finely! If you make the trip in that fashion you will not serve as a fascine to some ditch. But, all the same, keep your eyes constantly upon your animal's ears. He is full of whims; but when he intends to play a trick he is honest enough to warn his rider by a certain movement of his ears, which the limbs of a great many people have caused them to recollect. Ah! you laugh. You will see, my boy."

As Jacques was about to start the stranger detained him.

"One word. Do you know in the neighborhood a family of honest people with whom I can spend the time until your return without awakening suspicions."

"I know ten such, but there is one above all which will meet your requirements. Leave this wood, follow the path on which I met you, take the main road, and stop before the first house you come across to your right. You will recognize it easily. Everything is open, doors and windows. You will be at my father's, Guillaume Grinedal's, just as if you were at home."

"Diable! but I will be quite comfortable there," said the stranger, with a smile. "Go now."

He withdrew his hand which rested upon the curb, and the horse started. A quarter of an hour after, the stranger entered the garden of Guillaume Grinedal. At the sight of a stranger, the falconer laid down a long pistol which he was polishing and rose to meet him.

"What do you wish?" he said to him.

"Hospitality."

"Enter. What I have is yours. If you are hungry you shall eat, if you are thirsty you shall drink, and poor though I am, I always have a bed for the honest traveler."

Saying which, Pere Guillaume uncovered his forehead; his honest countenance, furrowed by toil, preserved an expression of dignity which made him appear above his condition.

"I thank you," said the stranger; "my visit will be short. When your son shall have returned I will leave."

Guillaume questioned him with a look.

"Oh," continued his guest, "he runs no danger. Before the moon rises he will have returned. I am a merchant from Arras going to Lille on business; the country is unsafe, and I thought that your son might more successfully than myself charge himself with a valise left in the hands of my valet at Witternesse. One cannot take too many precautions in the times in which we live."

"You are right," said the falconer, when they had arrived in the middle room of the house, "we live in a time when it is necessary to surround one's self with precautions. But in the house of an honest man there is no need for them; therefore, my gentleman, do not trouble yourself to disguise your language and your manners."

At these words, the stranger trembled.

"I do not ask you your quality and your name," continued the falconer. "The guest is sacred; his secret is like

his person. I myself have gray nair; I have seen nothing, heard nothing, understood nothing."

"You are an honest man!" the stranger impetuously exclaimed. "Mon Dieu! I have nothing to gain by dissimulating with you. You have not deceived yourself, Maître Guillaume, I am——"

"More, perhaps, than I suppose," the falconer hastened to add, "and that is why I take the liberty to interrupt you, in order not to know more. Let you be Spaniard or Frenchman, you are none the less a traveler confided to my care. This roof protects you. If you are one of those who have drawn the sword against their king and their country, it is God's privilege to judge you. I do my duty; may you be able to say 'I do mine.'"

The pretended merchant lowered his eyes under the serene look of the artisan, and a blush passed over his forehead like a flash of lightning. But immediately regaining his serenity, he saluted the old falconer with his hand.

"So be it, my honest fellow, I will not charge your memory with a recollection; but, by the name of my father, I shall neither forget yours nor what you are doing."

Two hours passed, and the stranger partook of the falconer's dinner, making himself at home, as if under the tent of a soldier or in the dwelling of a great lord. Then two more hours passed; at the end of the fourth he showed a slightly perceptible uneasiness. He walked to the window and opened it, listening intently; night had come, and the road was undisturbed by any sound. Presently he left the house and advanced to the garden gate. Pere Guillaume followed him. The silence was profound.

"Your son is brave?" the stranger brusquely said to the falconer.

"Honest and brave as steel."

"He will then defend a charge confided to his fidelity?"

"He is only a child, but he would brave death like a man."

"Then I fear for your son, Maître Guillaume."

The father did not reply, but in the rays of the moon the stranger saw the pallor extending over his forehead. Both were silent, with eyes fixed upon the white line of the road which was lost in a vague and unlimited horizon. The mysteries of the night filled space with noises confused, rapid, and uncertain. Guillaume Grinedal leaned upon the garden palings; you could hear the wood cracking under the nervous grasp of his hands.

"Nothing, nothing yet," the stranger murmured. "Oh! I would give a thousand louis to hear the gallop of a horse."

As he spoke a detonation sounded in the distance, beyond the woods whose thick shadows divided the horizon. The falconer overturned the palings and leaped into the road.

"A gun-shot! Did you hear it?" exclaimed the gentleman.

"I heard it," replied Guillaume Grinedal, who threw himself in the road, flat upon the stomach.

Two more detonations again broke the silence, but the sounds came from so far away that the ear of a father or an outlaw was necessary to distinguish them from the thousand noises which floated under the profound sky.

Guillaume Grinedal was listening with ear pressed to the ground.

"Well?" said the gentleman.

"Nothing, nothing yet! My heart throbs and my ears tingle," said the poor father. "Ah! yes, now a muffled and continuous noise! He approaches—it is the gallop of a horse."

"Oh! the brave young fellow!" exclaimed the stranger, explosively.

Guillaume Grinedal said nothing, but uncovering his forehead, whitened by years, he raised his eyes to heaven and prayed. The gentleman was looking into space, his head inclined forward. You would have said that his sparkling eyes wished to pierce the shadowy transparence of the night.

"I see him, mordieu! I see him. The horse has wings, and the child is astride him."

The gentleman seized the falconer's arm.

"Do you not recognize him?" said he.

But the falconer was thanking God; two great tears trembled on the border of his eyelids, and his quivering lips murmured a prayer of gratitude. The stranger withdrew his hand, and filled with a religious emotion, raised his hat. A few bounds brought the horse to them. The child leaped to the ground and fell into the arms of the falconer.

"My father!" he exclaimed.

The father silently pressed him to his heart.

"But," said Guillaume Grinedal, suddenly, "there is blood on your clothes. Are you wounded?"

"It is nothing," replied Jacques; "a ball has torn my

blouse here, near the shoulder, and has scratched me, I believe."

"You are a valiant fellow, upon my faith," said the gentleman; "if you ever enroll yourself under the flag of His Majesty, King Louis, you will make your way. Come, have you the valise?"

"It is upon the croup of the horse."

"Poor Phœbus! You have had a rough time, hey?" said the stranger, gayly passing his hand over the horse's neck.

Phœbus rubbed his foaming nostrils against the gentleman's coat, pricked up his ears at his master's voice, neighed, and struck the soil with his foot.

"You have been pursued, then?" continued the stranger, as he unstrapped the valise.

"At a league from Witternesse I left the main road in order to avoid Spanish marauders," replied Jacques. "Two leagues farther on, near Blaudecques, I fell into the midst of hussars and imperials who were roving the country. They pushed me closely for a quarter of an hour. But Phœbus has good legs. At the entrance to the wood they lost track of me. Ah! I forgot! Bergame has charged me with a letter for you. Here it is."

The gentleman broke the seal, and approaching the window, he read rapidly in the light of a lamp.

"It is well, my child. If we should meet some day, in whatever situation we should find each other, you can appeal to the guest of Guillaume Grinedal; he will recollect."

At dawn the stranger mounted Phœbus, who had forgotten, between a fresh litter and two bushels of oats, the fatigues of the evening. The stranger wore the costume of an Artois peasant.

"Adieu, Guillaume," he said to the falconer, giving him his hand; "I offer you nothing. Your hospitality is such as cannot be paid, and I should fear to offend you by giving you gold. Take my hand, and press it without fear. Under whatever dress I may conceal myself, it is, I swear to you, the hand of a loyal gentleman. As to you, friend Jacques, preserve that honest heart and that determined courage, and fortune will come to your aid; if God spares me, I will pray him to furnish me an occasion to aid you as you have aided me."

Jacques' great black eyes shone with a proud joy as he gazed upon the stranger. In spite of his deformed shoulder, the pretended merchant from Arras seemed more noble and more imposing than all the officers of the king whom

he had yet seen. As the stranger took his hand Jacques' heart beat rapidly, and when, pressing Phœbus' flanks, the unknown rode away at a gallop, father and son kept their eyes on him for a long time, touched and silent. As they were returning to the garden Jacques' foot struck a brilliant object which had fallen upon the sand. It was a gold medallion.

"See, my father," said the child; "the stranger must undoubtedly have lost it."

"Keep it, my son; perhaps it is Providence which sends it to you."

CHAPTER II.

THE FIRST TEARS.

The recollection of this adventure remained in Jacques' memory. Time might make faint its details, but the affair itself was fixed like a luminous spot in the depth of his heart. From the day of his meeting with the stranger he contracted a keener taste for things pertaining to war. When a squadron passed over the road, banner floating in the wind and trumpet at the head, he ran after it as far as his legs could carry him and hummed fanfares for a whole week. At times it also happened to him to form the children of the faubourg into a regiment and with them to deliver a counterfeit battle or imitate some siege, which always ended by furious mêlées in which his arms did wonders; child though he was, he already displayed a surprising address in the handling of arms—sword, saber, ax, pike, dagger, pistol, or musket. The words of the Arras merchant, "If ever you enrol yourself, you will make your way," buzzed constantly in his ears, but we should add that there was no drill, review, combat, and assault which Jacques did not willingly abandon to follow Mademoiselle de Malzonvilliers when she went with Claudine to search for strawberries in the woods. On these occasions, which were renewed every day, the little general sighed with all his heart and stood confused when Suzanne's hand encountered his. The little girl made him go and come at her will, but with so much natural grace and with an air so charming, that Jacques would have left for the end of the world without deliberating, upon a sign from her blue eyes.

The years passed then between studies, battles, and

rambles over the country. It was a time of troubles and wars; nothing was talked about except cities attacked, camps surprised, and murderous expeditions. Cardinal Mazarin and the king's party struggled against Parliament, the princes, and the Spaniard. Monsieur de Condé held the country, sometimes conqueror, sometimes conquered; but up to this time the town of St. Omer, protected by a good garrison, had not suffered from the enemy's depredations. Jacques would have left long since, if he had not been detained by the charm which he experienced in living near Mademoiselle de Malzonvilliers. This sentiment was so much the more imperious that he took no account of it. Chance, that great architect of the future, caused him to read his heart. One day, as he was seated in a corner of the garden, head bowed and rolling a dagger between his fingers, his sister Claudine came and softly struck him on the shoulder. Jacques trembled.

"Of what are you thinking?" said the frolicsome child to her brother.

"I do not know."

"Do you wish me to tell you? You are thinking of Mam'selle Suzanne."

"Why of her rather than of another'?' exclaimed Jacques, somewhat confused.

"Because Suzanne is Suzanne."

"Beautiful reason!"

"Very good," replied the child, whose mischievous smile half parted her vermilion lips. "Oh, I understand!"

"Then, explain yourself."

"Hold, Jacques," added Claudine, taking on a serious air, "you are thinking of Mam'selle Suzanne because you love her."

Jacques blushed to the roots of his hair; he rose with a bound; a new trouble filled his soul, and a thousand confused sensations animated him.

"Heavens! what is the matter with you?" exclaimed Claudine, frightened at the sudden change which had taken place in her brother's features.

"Listen to me, my sister; you are only a little girl——"

"I will be fifteen when the apricots come," said the child.

"But," continued Jacques, "it is said that little girls understand these things better than grown boys. Why have you told me that I love Mam'selle Suzanne? It may be that I do, but I do not know it."

"Bless me! that is to be seen at the first glance. I cannot

tell you how; but I have understood it from several things which I cannot explain to you, because I do not know by what end to take them. In the first place, you do not speak to her as to the other girls you know; and then you have eyes as sweet as honey when you look at her; you make wide circuits to avoid her, and nevertheless you always meet her, or—well, you seek her everywhere, and when you do not find her, you stop short, and one would say that you desired to conceal yourself. In short, I neither know why nor how, but you love her."

"It is true," murmured Jacques; "it is true, I love her."

His voice, as he pronounced these words so sweet to his heart, had something grave and sad about it which touched Claudine.

"Well," said she, slipping her pretty arms around her brother's neck, "do not go and afflict yourself now? Is it such a painful thing to love people that it is necessary to assume that unhappy air. See, you are going to make me weep."

Then poor Claudine dried the corners of her eyes with her apron; then smiling with the nobility of childhood, she raised herself upon her tiptoes, and placing her mouth to Jacques' ear, she continued:

"Bah! if I were you I should rejoice. Suzanne is not your sister. I am sure that she loves you as much as you love her. You shall marry her."

Jacques kissed Claudine upon both cheeks.

"You are a kind sister," he said to her; "go, now, I know what honesty requires of me."

And Jacques, disengaging himself from his sister's embrace, left the garden. He was going straight to the chateau, when he encountered Monsieur de Malzonvilliers.

"I was seeking you, monsieur," he said to him, as he saluted him.

"Me? And what have you to say to me, my boy?"

"I have to speak to you of an important affair."

"Really? Well, speak; I am listening to you."

"Monsieur, I am to-day eighteen years and some months old," said Jacques, with the grave air of an ambassador. "I am an honest fellow who has strong arms and a little education; I shall have one day two or three thousand livres from an uncle who is a curé in Picardy; as to that which might come to me on my father's side, I have decided to leave it to Claudine. In this state, I come to ask you if you will consent to give me your daughter in marriage."

"In marriage to you! What are you talking about?" exclaimed Monsieur de Malzonvilliers, thoroughly stupefied.

"I say, monsieur, that I love Mademoiselle Suzanne; the respect I owe to you and my duty do not permit me to inform her of it before having spoken to you of my sentiments. That is why I come to ask you to accept me for your son-in-law."

During this discourse Jacques was standing in the middle of the path, hat in hand, a handkerchief wrapped around his neck, and wearing a gray smock.

"There is no need for me to say to you," he added, "that your consent will render me perfectly happy, and that I will no longer have any other desire than to recognize your kindness by my good conduct and my devotion."

All at once Monsieur de Malzonvilliers burst out laughing. The strangeness of the proposition and the coolness with which it had been made had stupefied him at first; but at the last words of Jacques he could not keep from laughing in the face of the poor fellow. All of Jacques' blood mounted to his face. In spite of the illusions with which youth lulls itself, his native good sense told him that his demand would not be welcomed, but his candid honesty did not permit him to believe that it might give matter for pleasantry.

"My proposition has amused you," he resumed, with an ill-concealed emotion. "I was not expecting, I confess, to cause you so much joy."

"Eh, my friend, neither was I expecting such an adventure. Did one ever see a thing like it? It is more amusing than a comedy of Monsieur Corneille, 'pon my word."

Jacques tore his hat-brim with his fingers, but he was silent. Monsieur de Malzonvilliers kept on laughing. Finally, no longer able to restrain himself, he sat down upon a block of stone on the side of the path.

"You will have sufficient leisure to laugh after," said Jacques, "but now is the time to answer me; you cannot guess, monsieur, what has taken place in my heart since I have known that I love Mademoiselle Suzanne. I am waiting."

"Come, my boy, are you mad?" replied the farmer of revenue, drying his eyes.

"A madman does not come to honestly ask her father for the hand of a young girl."

"You speak seriously, then?"

"Quite seriously."

"Be silent, and above all, do not look at me with that

air of an unhappy swain, or you will stifle me with laughter, and I warn you that it would be to abuse my position; I am much fatigued, my friend."

"Therefore such is not my intention; I only desire to know what are your sentiments."

"Go to the devil with my sentiments! Have I the time to amuse myself with the trifles which enter the head of a madman? What a beautiful alliance—the daughter of Monsieur de Malzonvilliers with the son of Guillaume Grinedal, the falconer!"

"Rail at me as much as you please, monsieur, I shall not grow offended," Jacques quickly exclaimed; "but take care not to touch my father's name, for as sure as there is a God in heaven, the one that insults him, were it Suzanne's father, would have my vengeance to fear."

" And what would you do, rascal?"

"I would strangle him!"

And Jacques raised above his head two hands strong enough to quickly give effect to the threat. Monsieur de Malzonvilliers brusquely arose and carried his hand to his neck; he already seemed to feel Jacques' fingers fastened upon it. But Jacques suddenly lowered his arms, and of his violent emotion there no longer remained anything but a great pallor upon his countenance.

"I ask your pardon for my hastiness," he said. "I ought never to forget the benefits which you have conferred on my family; this anger is the fault of my youth and not of my heart; forget it, monsieur. You would not be vexed with me if you knew how much I suffer since love has possessed me. I only live for Mademoiselle Suzanne, and I well feel that I cannot obtain her. But if to merit her it would be necessary for me to undertake something impossible, tell me, and with God's aid it seems to me that I should succeed. Speak, monsieur; what must I attempt? Whatever it may be, I am ready to obey, and if I do not succeed, I shall sacrifice my life in the effort."

There is always in the expression of a true sentiment an accent which touches; tears had come to Jacques' eyes, and his attitude expressed at the same time anguish and resignation; Monsieur de Malzonvilliers was at bottom a good man; vanity had obscured his judgment without spoiling his heart; he felt touched and extended his hand to Jacques.

"There is no occasion to grieve, my friend," he said to him, "nor to take things so hard. You love, so you say. It has not been a great while since I loved, but I do not re-

collect to have loved at eighteen. You will forget as I have forgotten, and you will not feel any ill-effects from it."

Jacques shook his head sadly.

"Yes! yes! everybody talks that way," continued the farmer of revenue. "Eh? My God! at your age I already believed myself in the river because I had lost the object of my first flame. But, bah! I have lost many others since. Let us talk sense, my boy; you will understand me, for you do not lack for intelligence. Several gentlemen of the neighborhood have asked me for Suzanne's hand. Can I conscientiously prefer you who have nothing, neither profession, nor fortune, and repulse those who have both?"

Jacques lowered his head, and a tear fell to the ground.

"Parbleau, if you were rich and noble," resumed Monsieur de Malzonvilliers, "I should wish for no other son-in-law than yourself."

"If I were rich and noble?" exclaimed Jacques.

"Yes, certainly."

"Well, monsieur, I shall endeavor to win fortune and nobility."

"Listen, then, my friend, these things do not come quickly. I do not promise you to wait."

Jacques hesitated a moment; then raising his eyes to heaven, he said:

"God sparing me, monsieur, I shall make as much haste as I can."

"Poor fellow!" murmured Monsieur de Malzonvilliers, as Jacques moved away; "it is truly unfortunate that he is not a marquis, or at least a millionaire."

Jacques directed his course with a slow but firm step toward a part of the park of Malzonvilliers where Suzanne was accustomed to walk at this hour, a book or some needlework in her hand. He accosted her resolutely and related to her the conversation which he had just had with her father; his voice trembled, but his glance was steady. Suzanne had felt herself blush at Jacques' first word, but soon overcoming her emotions, she had fixed upon her lover that clear and serene look which beamed like a star in the depths of her blue eyes.

"Your father has left me no hope, mademoiselle," said Jacques, after he had finished his narrative; "nevertheless I am determined to undertake everything to merit you Do you permit me?"

"Do you love me, Jacques?" said the young girl, in that sweet and vibrating voice which sounded like crystal.

"Do I love you? I would give my life for my sister

Claudine; but, mademoiselle, it seems to me—and God pardon me this blasphemy—that I would give my soul's safety for you."

"I shall then be your wife one day, my friend," said Suzanne, extending her hand to Jacques, who felt his heart melt at these words. "Both of us are very young, almost two children," she added, with a smile, "but God will come to our aid."

"I have a strong heart," exclaimed Jacques. "Oh, mademoiselle, I shall win you."

"I count on it, and I promise you to never belong to any one but you."

Jacques wished to kiss Suzanne's hand, but Suzanne opened her arms, and the two children embraced each other. Both were at the same time grave and ingenuous. They believed in their love.

"Go and merit me," said Suzanne, her cheeks humid and blushing; "I shall wait for you."

They exchanged a last oath and separated.

Jacques went back to the cottage, serious but no longer sad. He at once imparted to Guillaume Grinedal what had taken place during the day.

"We love each other," he added, "and we shall marry."

The father looked at the swallows which were flying far off in the blue sky.

"Lovers' oaths!" said he, shaking his bald head. "But whether they last or not matters little, my son, you must go away."

"Such was my intention," replied Jacques.

Father and son pressed each other's hands.

"The daughter belongs to the father," said Guillaume Grinedal. "Monsieur de Malzonvilliers has been kind to us; he must not accuse you of having wished to sow disorder in his house. You will leave to-morrow without seeking to see Suzanne again."

Jacques hesitated.

"It must be so," repeated the elder.

"I shall leave," said the son; "I shall leave without seeing her again."

Toward evening, at the accustomed hour, they sat down around the table. The dinner was barely touched. They sat in silence. Jacques did not eat, and the refrain of the songs which he was accustomed to hum died upon his lips. Claudine did not wish to speak, for fear of bursting into sobs. She turned aside at times to dry her eyes. Jacques and Guillaume tried to appear calm, but the morsels which

they carried to their lips they again placed back untouched upon their plates. After the evening prayer the father embraced his three children. He retained Jacques the longest upon his heart.

"Go to sleep," he said to him; "but previously ask God for courage to live the life which begins for you to-morrow."

The father withdrew, and the three children began to weep. Not one had the strength to express his disappointment, and each of them found fewer words to say than kisses to give. Toward dawn the family gathered together on the threshold of the door. Jacques had put on large shoes and gaiters, a leather belt tightened his blouse around his waist, a small haversack was suspended to his shoulders, and his hand was armed with a stout stick of hollywood. Pierre and Claudine were sobbing. Jacques was slightly pale, but his look had regained all its assurance and firmness.

"Where are you going, my son?" said the father.

Even at this epoch Paris was the magic city, the radiant center which attracted every active intelligence, every audacious mind, every unquiet imagination. Jacques had not for a moment thought of the details of the extreme part which he had chosen, nevertheless at his father's question, he unhesitatingly replied:

"To Paris."

"It is a great city, full of perils and surprises. Many have arrived there poor like yourself, and have gone away rich, but better to go away from it miserable than to leave your honesty there. May God bless you, my son."

Jacques knelt down between his brother and sister, and Guillaume placed his trembling hands upon the forehead of his first-born child. After he had risen, the father wished to slip in Jacques' hand a purse, in which some gold shone, but Jacques gave it back to him.

"Keep this gold," he said to him; "it is Claudine's dowry. I have arms and in my haversack fifty livres which I have earned."

The father did not insist, but drawing from his bosom a jewel attached to a ribbon, he passed it around Jacques' neck.

"Do you recognize it, Jacques?" he said to him. "It is the medallion lost by the stranger five years ago. You have well earned it, therefore keep it. If you again come across the gentleman to whom it belongs, you will return it to him, and perhaps he will recall the hospitality of our

roof. Let us embrace each other now, and may God guide you."

Jacques first embraced Guillaume and Pierre. Claudine had remained slightly in the rear; when it was her turn, she threw herself on Jacques' neck.

"I embrace you for myself first," she whispered to him, so low that her voice glided like a breath into the traveler's ear; "afterward for her."

Jacques trembled.

"Yes, for her," his sister resumed; "she herself has recommended me to do so."

Jacques passionately pressed Claudine to his heart at the recollection of Suzanne. He looked at the sky full of new courage, his eye shining with hope.

The first rays of dawn lit up the dewy plains. On the horizon floated a thousand gilded vapors, and the road was lost in the midst of solitudes bathed in light. Paris was yonder, behind that flaming horizon; Suzanne was the reward of triumph. Jacques snatched himself from Claudine's arms and took his departure.

CHAPTER III.

A STEP IN LIFE.

At some hundred steps from the cottage, the road made a turn and led up a small hill. Arrived at the top, Jacques turned back. Upon the threshold of the door, Guillaume Grinedal was standing, and near him, kneeling upon the ground, Pierre and Claudine holding his hands in theirs. Behind him Jacques left all his happiness, all that he had loved—the garden filled with shade and delightfully cool, the tranquil retreat where he had stammered his first prayer and dreamed his first dreams of love, the great plains which had protected his soul with their solitude and their serenity, the vast chateau, vailed by old elms, where he had so often sighed, without knowing the cause of his sighs, at the noise of two infantile lips singing a song of the country. The tawny oxen wandering over the fertile meadows, the bulls ruminating in the shade of the beech trees, the herd filing along the path, the black swarms of crows dispersed about the oaks, the young girl passing the babbling brook with bare feet, the stupid farmer urging on his loitering team, and even the larks

hidden in the hollow furrows or lost in the immense azure —all the beings and all the things of creation had a part in that life which had expanded like a limpid and fresh stream between two banks of soft grass. Behind him was repose and peace; before him was the unknown and its numberless accidents.

Jacques leaned against the stick of holly, and let his gaze wander far away. A thousand recollections awoke in a crowd in his heart; for a long time he listened to their confused voices which told him of the past filled with sweet joys and honest labors, and took pleasure in their mysterious narratives; his eyes turned toward the beautiful foliage which formed for Malzonvilliers a green belt. Two tears which came to wet his hands, without his having felt them flow over his cheeks, distracted him from his dream. How many others had not already fallen to the ground? Jacques shook his head and bounded to the other side of the hill. After having passed the night at Fauquenbergne, he arrived the next day at Fruges. In the inn where he stopped he heard that a troop of freebooters had penetrated into the country between Aire and St. Omer. They belonged, it was said, to a corps of Hungarian and Croatian soldiers which the Spanish government had licensed, and who sought to amass a large booty before leaving Flanders.

The inhabitants who were in easy circumstances were retiring in all haste in the direction of St. Pal or Montreuil; the others were concealing their most precious possessions. Among those who were decamping in all haste not one had yet seen anything, yet no one stopped, and no one dared turn back his head. Jacques thought that each one fled because he saw the others fly, and like the resolute fellow that he was, he determined to continue his journey, wishing to arrive at Hesdin before night. The day was hot, and Jacques had been walking since morning; appetite began to make itself felt along with fatigue. Perceiving neither Hungarians nor Croats, Jacques threw himself upon the side of the road near a spring, which bubbled in the shade of a clump of trees, and drawing from his satchel some provisions with which he had provided himself at Fruges, he dined merrily. At this place the grass was thick and the shade cool. Jacques looked over the road, and seeing nothing, neither foot-soldier nor cavalier, he stretched himself out like a shepherd of Virgil at the foot of a beech. He thought at first and a great deal of Mademoiselle de Malzonvilliers and

sighed; then at the recollection of the good people whom he had encountered flying like hares, he smiled. Undoubtedly he was going to think of many other things still, when he went to sleep.

Jacques only wished to rest, but youth proposes and the fresh grass disposes. He was sleeping then as one sleeps at eighteen, when a great noise of horses neighing and prancing awoke him in surprise. Seven or eight cavaliers were circling around him, while two others were unstrapping his haversack, after having leaped from the saddle. Jacques rose at a bound, and at the first blow of his fist felled one of the pillagers. He was going to take the other by the throat when three or four cavaliers pounced upon him and overthrew him. Before he could rise again a violent blow stunned him, and he remained stretched at the feet of the horses.

Only three minutes had been needed for the cavalier to unstrap his valise; it did not take them two to pillage the money and the effects, to despoil Jacques of his coat, and to disappear at a gallop. Jacques remained immovable for some moments, extended upon his back. The large brim of his felt hat having softened the force of the blow which was intended for him, Jacques was only stunned. When he raised himself again, half naked and moneyless, he ran to an elevation to reconnoiter the road which the pillagers had taken. A whirlwind of smoke, lashed by the wind, undulated in the plain; two villages were burning; between the crackling roofs of thatch passed the frightened animals. A dull cloud pitted with sparks was expanding in the distance. When the fire gained a straw-stack or some barn filled with hay a jet of flame divided the somber curtain with its red and forked lightnings. A body of cavalry was ranged in line of battle on the border of a stream. Jacques had never seen a similar uniform, which was composed of a white coat with yellow facings and black pants. At the head of it, going and coming from one end of the squadron to the other, rode a cavalier whose countenance indicated that he was the chief. He had no doubt but what he had to do with marauders belonging to the enemy, but in his naïve sentiment of equity, he fully believed that the chief would cause to be returned to him what had been stolen from him. If the King of Spain and the Emperor of Germany made war on the King of France, they ought not to make it on travelers. At the sight of a young man advancing toward them, bare-headed and coatless, the captain drew up.

"What do you wish?" he brusquely said to him, when Jacques was at two steps from his horse.

"Justice," Jacques tranquilly replied.

The chief smiled and passed his long and nervous fingers through his mustache.

Two cavaliers who followed him exchanged some rapid words; they spoke rather with the throat than with the lips, and their idiom struck Jacques' ears like the croaking of ravens.

"Of what do you complain?" said the chief.

"My valise, the effects which it contained, my money, even my clothes—everything has been taken from me."

"They left you your skin, and you complain. You are exacting."

Jacques thought he had not well understood.

"But I tell you——"

"And I tell you to hold your tongue!" exclaimed the chief. "You will answer when you are questioned."

The chief turned to his officers. During their short conference Jacques crossed his arms. The idea of flying did not enter his mind; it seemed to him impossible that any further harm could be done him.

"You are a Frenchman, undoubtedly?' said the chief returning to him.

"Yes."

"From this neighborhood, perhaps?"

"From St. Omer."

"You must know, then, the secret roads for gaining the frontiers of Flanders."

"Quite well."

"You will have to serve us, then, as guide that far. Though your compatriots decamp like flocks of ducks at our approach, I believe that we have advanced too far. I have enough of this kind of booty. However, if there are some good chateaux in the neighborhood, you will lead us to them. Go ahead."

Jacques did not budge.

"Did you hear me?" repeated the chief, touching him with the end of his switch.

"Perfectly well."

"Then march."

"No, I shall remain here."

"Remain here!" exclaimed the chief, and urging on his horse, he brought him up alongside the immovable Jacques.

The icy tube of a pistol touched Jacques' forehead.

"Come, do you know that all I have to do is to move my finger in order to blow out your brains?" said the chief.

"Move it, then, for I shall not serve you as guide in my country and against my own people."

The pistol was slowly lowered.

"Then you do not wish to lead us to the frontiers," added the chief, slipping his pistol under the saddle-bow.

"I cannot."

"Then it is I who will lead you there."

The chief spoke some words in a foreign tongue, and before Jacques could suspect the danger which threatened him, three or four soldiers had seized and bound him.

"There is in the company some old halters which will do you for a cravat," continued the chief, addressing himself to Jacques. "When we come to the limits of Artois I intend to leave you there, suspended to the most beautiful branch of the most beautiful oak I can find, in order to make you serve as an example to the inhabitants of the place. If the ravens permit you, scoundrel, you will have leisure to there meditate on the results of your honesty."

Upon a sign from the chief, two soldiers threw Jacques behind a cavalier. They tied him on the saddle like a sack, and the whole troop started at a trot in the direction of Hesdin. Jacques, bent in two, beat with his head and his feet the horse's flanks; the blood rushed to his extremities, his face became purple, his eyes grew blood-shot, a painful and confused buzzing filled his ears, the name of Suzanne expired upon his lips, and he closed his eyes. But just as the red vail which floated befcre his half-closed eyes was obscuring most his mind, he carried, by a most violent effort, his hands to his head. The straps which bound them touched his lips. He bit them, and the instinct of self-preservation returning with the hope of deliverance, he soon loosened the knots with his teeth. The cavalier was singing and polishing the guard of his saber. Jacques suspended himself by one hand to the horse's crupper, and with the other undid the strap which held him to the saddle. When he felt his limbs free he looked around him to see if any soldier of the squadron was watching him. The chief and the officers were riding in front, and the squadron followed them without thinking of the captive. The cavalier, busy with his weapon, did not press his horse, who, more heavily loaded than the others, had lost some ground and was now at the rear end of the column. Jacques let himself glide softly down into the road. No sooner than he felt the ground under his feet

all his vigor returned to him, and turning aside from the road, he took his way through the fields. But scarcely had he made two hundred steps when he heard a detonation, and at the same moment, a ball plowed up the sand at his feet. He turned his head and saw three or four cavaliers in pursuit of him, muskets in hand.

Jacques was lithe and vigorous. He crossed hedges and ditches like a squirrel, but he could not hold out long against horses. The cavalier to whose care he had been confided showed himself the most ardent in his pursuit.

Already he was some hundred steps in advance of his comrades, when Jacques, realizing the uselessness of his flight, stopped. The cavalier came galloping up to him with raised saber, but Jacques avoided the stroke by throwing himself to one side, and seizing the soldier by the left leg, he pulled him down from off the horse. While the soldier, bruised by his fall, was writhing on the ground, Jacques leaped into the saddle and rode away. For some minutes the comrades of the vanquished man followed after him, two or three balls scratched the soil about him, but soon the marauders slacked their course. The squadron was far behind them, and in front there extended an unknown country, where the enemy might rise up at any moment. One of them drew up his horse and turned back, the second imitated him, then the third also, and Jacques no longer heard their furious gallop sounding in his ears. In his turn he tightened the reins and put his steed to a slow trot Jacques had not ridden a quarter of an hour in the direction of St. Pal when he discovered, beyond Fleury, a troop of cavaliers carrying some foot-soldiers on the croups of their horses. The first encounter had taught the falconer's son enough of the usages of war to render him circumspect. For a moment he thought of entering a little patch of woods, when a new reflection decided him to push straight on. He was too close to St. Pal, a strong city occupied by a large garrison, to fear that the enemy had dared venture this far. A sentry who was riding two or three hundred steps from the troop, astonished to see a great fellow having only a pair of pants and a shirt galloping upon a thoroughly equipped horse, stopped Jacques.

"Lead me to your captain," said Jacques to the most conspicuous one of the band.

"That is just what I was going to propose to you, my comrade," replied the brigadier.

The captain was a handsome young man whose good appearance was enhanced by the military costume. A slender

black mustache set off lips of the purest contour. A deep pallor, spread over his delicate features, gave his physiognomy an inexpressible distinction and charm. Jacques felt reassured at the first look. Friend or enemy, he was dealing with a brave gentleman. The officer silently considered Jacques for a moment, and a passing smile lit up his countenance, over which melancholy had thrown its mysterious vail.

"If you are a Frenchman," he at last said, in a clear and sweet voice, "fear nothing, you are among Frenchmen."

Jacques related to him what had happened to him, his sleep, his capture, his deliverance, the peril which he had escaped. The officer listened to him, twisting the end of his mustache, his eyes fixed upon those of the young man. Jacques understood the significance of this look. He blushed.

"You take me for a spy?" said he, in a quick tone.

"Not now; cowardice does not possess those honest features and that proud look. It trembles, but it does not blush. You are a brave fellow, and you shall lead us to the place where you left the freebooters."

"Willingly. When I lost sight of them they were taking the road to the Abbaye de St. Georges, near Bergueneuse, and cannot be more than a league from here."

Upon the captain's order, Jacques was furnished with a coat, hat, saber, and pistols.

"Did you ever handle these togs?" said the officer.

"You can judge, my captain, if we come across the bandits who robbed me."

"Go ahead, then."

Jacques placed himself at the head of the troop, which was composed of almost two hundred cavaliers carrying behind them as many grenadiers. It had just been detailed from the garrison of St. Pal, to repulse the marauders of the Spanish army who had been described by the scouts.

The officer rode by Jacques' side.

"You handle your horse like an old soldier," he said to him at the end of five mintues. "Where did you learn horsemanship?"

"At my father's, who lives at St. Omer."

"Ah! you are from St. Omer? Then you have, perhaps, known an honest falconer named Guillaume Grinedal?"

"How could I fail to know him, since he is my father."

The officer trembled. He turned his face toward Jacques and began to consider him attentively.

"Your father! That old Guillaume Grinedal who has so often held me on his knees is your father? Your name is Jacques, then?"

It was Jacques' turn to tremble. He looked at the officer, deeply moved, seeking to read upon his countenance a name which his heart repeated in a low tone.

"My name? You know my name?" said he.

The officer gave him his hand.

"Have you, then, forgotten Monsieur d'Assonville?" he said.

"Our benefactor!" exclaimed Jacques.

And he pressed his lips to the captain's hand.

"Not that one, Jacques, but his son, Gaston d'Assonville. The father is dead. He was Guillaume's friend; the son will be that of Jacques."

CHAPTER IV.

THE SKIRMISH.

The troop commanded by Monsieur d'Assonville, captain of light-horse, was still ten minutes' ride from the Abbaye de St. Georges, whose white walls were outlined between some clumps of trees to the right of the road, when gun-shots were heard a short distance away.

A peasant who was fleeing upon a sorry nag informed Monsieur d'Assonville that twenty marauders had presented themselves at the abbey, had forced the doors and ordered the nuns to prepare provisions for the whole troop, if they did not wish to see their house fired.

"What did the abbe do?" asked the captain, whose eyes grew inflamed.

"Bless you!" said the peasant, "he emptied the cellar and had the tables set."

"Well, we shall eat the dinner after the ball."

"Hum!" said the other, "it is my opinion, my officer, that many of the dancers will be missing at the feast. The Hungarians are numerous."

"How many?"

"Six or seven hundred, all on horseback and well armed. Their chief has had the trumpet sounded; the scattered bands have collected from every direction, and while waiting for supper to be prepared, they are pillaging Auvin."

The village was on fire, and the fusillade burst in the plain.

Monsieur d'Assonville rose in his stirrups, sword in hand. He was no longer the pale young man with the colorless forehead. Lightning flashed from his eyes, and blood reddened his cheeks.

"Forward!" he exclaimed, in a thundering tone, and with the end of his sword he pointed out to his soldiers the flaming village. The whole troop moved off.

At sight of the French the clarions sounded, and the enemy ranged themselves in line of battle at some distance from Auvin, on the banks of the Ternoise. It was a numerous and well-mounted troop; but Monsieur d'Assonville was one of those who do not know how to draw back. He made the grenadiers alight and divided them into platoons of from twenty to twenty-five men between his cavaliers.

"Make use of the gun as we shall the saber," he said to them, "and we shall make these devilish scoundrels pass over the river without boats."

The grenadiers cried, "Vive le roi!" and got their arms in readiness. Just as Monsieur d'Assonville was going to give the signal of attack an old officer touched him lightly on the arm.

"Monsieur le Comte," he said to him, "they are two to our one and have the advantage of position."

"What! it is you, Monsieur du Coudrais, who counts the enemy?"

"I must account to the king, my master, for the lives of all these brave men," said the officer, indicating with the end of his sword the impatient soldiers. "Now order, and you will see if I hesitate to let myself be killed."

"No, monsieur, you shall triumph with your grenadiers. They are two to our one. Well, we have for us the sight of that burning village! Each hut which falls in, cries for revenge. Forward!"

Every member of the troop heard these words. The electrified soldiers bounded forward, and Jacques, one of the first to feel the transport, felt running in his veins the shudder of war. The Hungarians, after having prepared for battle, awaited the French. Thanks to the superiority of numbers, they counted upon an easy victory; far from thinking of placing the river between themselves and their assailants—which would have doubled their strength by the advantage of position—they ran to the encounter pell-mell and without order

as soon as they saw their opponents moving forward. The shock was terrible; the fusillade burst along all the line, and the cavaliers clashed together with saber and pistol in hand. For a moment one might have believed success to be doubtful. The combatants formed a single moving mass bound by anger and the savage love of blood; from this confused mass mounted a noise of steel mixed with howlings of death. At each moment a man disappeared in the midst of that ocean of heads which was surrounded by a thousand flashes of light, where sounded the din of arms, and the space was contracted; but the discharges of Monsieur du Coudrais' grenadiers, who were fighting in good order, had lit up the enemy's ranks; the Hungarians, crushed under a hail of balls coming from every side at the same time, pressed by the fiery impetuosity of the cavaliers who were inflamed by Monsieur d'Assonville's example, gave way and lost ground. A soldier looked back, another turned bridle, a third threw himself all armed into the Ternoise, ten or twelve took to flight, an entire squadron gave way, then finally the whole troop recoiled in a frightful disorder.

"Forward!" again cried Monsieur d'Assonville, and urging his horse up to the last combatants, he precipitated the whole troop into the river. When the horses plunged their feet in the water it was a rout. Hungarians and Croats rode away, at a gallop, throwing aside their muskets, and the saber cut to pieces the fugitives.

Jacques saw for the first time and in close proximity all the horrors of combat. Emotion made his lips tremble; but the prancing of the horses, the flashing of swords, the noise of the explosions, the odor of powder, excited his youthful courage; he brandished his saber with a firm hand and rushed straight before him. A Croat whom he rubbed against in his course fired a pistol almost in his face; the ball traversed Jacques' hat two inches from his forehead. Jacques replied by a furious thrust. The Croat fell upon his back with extended arms; the saber had entered his throat. Jacques felt spouting upon his hand the warm and boiling blood. He looked at the paling soldier who was carried away by his frightened horse. It was the first man he had killed. Jacques lowered his saber point and shivered, but he was in the first row, and the whirlwind pushed him forward. In the midst of the mêlée Jacques encountered Monsieur d'Assonville and staid by his side. These two were the first to make their horses enter the reddened river, but when only fugitives were

left they sheathed their sabers. The captain extended his hand to the soldier.

"You have conducted yourself well, Jacques," he said to him. "Mordieu! you were right to wish to measure yourself against these robbers. You have paid them the price of your valise!"

"Faith, sir, I have done what I could."

"Eh? my comrade, those men running will tell you that you have done too much."

The battle-field was encumbered with dead and wounded; the enemy had left three hundred of their men upon the ground; a hundred had remained in the hands of the French, so that the freebooters had lost the half of their troop. Meanwhile the clarions sounded, and the soldiers scattered in all directions gathered together under their guidons.

"You have not yet joined the regiment, my boy," said Monsieur d'Assonville to Jacques; "therefore go about your business. Think that you have lost one valise, and do not hesitate to reimburse yourself with two."

He took his way toward the river, head bowed and soul sick. How far away already was the peace of the cottage. It had not taken two days for Jacques to kill four or five men and wound seven or eight others. While walking in the midst of dead bodies, his eyes fell upon his hands. They were still moist and red, and a shiver traversed him. What a route then he was going to follow to reach Suzanne, and what a bloody beginning his love had just offered him! Jacques was standing at this moment where the mêlée had been most furious. The ground was heaped with corpses, and in the midst of the extended Hungarians his vague and absent looks encountered a soldier who, fallen at twenty steps from the Ternoise, was trying to reach the bank. The Hungarian was crawling upon his hands and knees; he dragged himself the space of some feet, then sank down. Jacques ran to him and raised him.

"Water! water!" said the Hungarian, whose face was bathed in coagulated blood. "Water! I am burning!"

Jacques transported him to the bank of the Ternoise, and presented to his burning lips a hat filled with water.

The Hungarian bathed his face in this cold water and drank eagerly.

"My throat is on fire, and my lips are like two hot irons," said he, licking the dripping brim of the hat.

Jacques leaned him against the trunk of a tree and washed his face for him. The Hungarian had received a saber cut

upon the head and a ball in the stomach. When the mud and blood were cleaned off and left his features uncovered, Jacques uttered a cry. The wounded man raised his eyes to him.

"Ah! you recognize me now," said he, with a bitter laugh. "When you raised me I said nothing, for I was thirsty. Now finish me if you wish to do so."

"Oh!" said Jacques, with an expression of horror.

"Parbleu! you have the right to do it."

"The right of an assassin!"

"Ah! you have those scruples! As for myself, I shall not be too conscientious if some day—— But you have placed me in too piteous a state for me to ever begin again. Diable! you have avenged yourself well."

"No, I have fought, that is all."

"Oh, I am not vexed with you about it. If I had cracked your head for you, all this would not have happened. It is a lesson, but it is a little late for me to make use of it; let it profit you at least."

The officer turned over on his side.

"You see," he resumed, "when you hold an enemy, the shortest way is to blow out his brains. It is a principle which I have always put in practice; as a result of having forgotten it once, you see to what I am reduced——"

A convulsion seized the Hungarian, who writhed at the foot of the tree.

"Water! water!" he again murmured. "I have coals of fire in my stomach."

Jacques placed a hatful at his side, and ran to seek aid. He found Monsieur d'Assonville inspecting his troop, followed by a quartermaster, who was erasing the names of the dead from the company's book.

"The Hungarian officer who wished to hang me on the frontier of Artois is dying," Jacques said to him; "can I not get him transported to the ambulance so that he can receive the care which his condition calls for?"

Monsieur d'Assonville looked at Jacques.

"Ah! it is the captain who wished to hang you on the frontier of Artois! 'Tis well, my boy, go ahead."

Jacques left with two grenadiers The Hungarian officer was placed upon a litter lined with bundles of straw. Some drops of blood had congealed on the borders of his open wounds, and his teeth chattered with cold. The falconer's son covered him with his coat.

"What kind of a heart have you?" the officer brusquely said to him.

"The same as all the world."

"Parbleu! You are indeed the first inhabitant of that world whom I have met."

The eyes of the Hungarian shone and were dimmed turn by turn; when he opened them he looked at Jacques.

"Perhaps it is better," he continued, "that I should be the one to leave and you to remain. I am of no account, and you have the air of an honest young man. Accident has turned out to be right."

The Hungarian was silent for some minutes; a convulsive trembling agitated him, and his eyes were vailed. Suddenly he turned them toward Jacques filled with an extraordinary fire.

"Do you believe that there is something up there?" he said to him, pointing to the sky with his finger.

"God is there."

"Do you wish to give me your hand?"

Jacques extended his hand to the old soldier, who pressed it with more vigor than one could have expected of a man so cruelly wounded; he threw himself back upon the straw and pulled Jacques' coat over him. After the lapse of a moment, Jacques no longer hearing him speak or complain, leaned toward him.

"How are you, my captain?" he said to him.

"Quite well, my friend."

The glance was keen, the face softly colored, the voice clear. Jacques was silent, thinking that the Hungarian officer wished to sleep. When they arrived at the ambulance, he raised the coat; the Hungarian officer was dead. Two hours after, the troop had collected at the Abbaye de St. Georges, around tables prepared for their enemies. They laughed heartily and ate with a good appetite. If the wounded were pitied, the dead were forgotten; the living congratulated each other, and everything went off well enough. Monsieur d'Assonville conducted Jacques to a room of the abbey in which a table was set.

"Sit down there," he said to him.

"Me! near you?"

"After the combat, there is no longer either master or servant—there are only soldiers. Sit down, I tell you, and relate your history to me."

Monsieur d'Assonville was no longer the brilliant officer whose eyes flashed lightning at the moment of battle; the sadness had returned to his forehead and the pallor to his cheeks, where the sharp line of his mustache was outlined like a pencil-mark upon alabaster; to the generous

ardor, to the manly pride, to the bold impatience whose flame just now colored his handsome face, a sweet and melancholy smile had succeeded. Jacques felt himself at the same time touched and attracted by that mysterious sadness whose source must originate in the depth of the heart. He sat down and related the innocent story of his youth, of his love, and of his departure. Monsieur d'Assonville listened to him; for a moment his eyes were moistened at the narrative of the innocent love of Jacques, but this moment was so brief that Jacques did not even see his humid eyeball shine. Monsieur d'Assonville carried his glass to his mouth.

"I drink to your hopes," said he.

Jacques sighed.

"It is the fortune of the poor!" he murmured. "If your sweetheart has an honest and sincere heart, keep them; but if she is weak like the reed or deceitful like the wind, boldly drive them from your mind. Betrayed hopes are like thorns which lacerate."

"I hope because I believe," replied Jacques.

"You are eighteen!" exclaimed Monsieur d'Assonville, and a flash of bitter irony passed over his eyes. Then, more softly, he resumed:

"Believe, Jacques; belief is the perfume of life and the ornament of youth; woe to those who have not believed—they have not loved; they die without having lived."

Monsieur d'Assonville pressed both of Jacques' hands; the reflection of an ill-extinguished passion illuminated his face, and he swallowed his glass at a draught.

"Of what am I thinking?" he presently said; "it is a question of love and not of philosophy. Come, Jacques, what do you count on doing?"

"I have told you—to go to Paris and seek fortune, unless you consent to keep me with you."

"We will see about that later, and I shall willingly consent if my company can be of service to you. But suppose for a moment that you have arrived at Paris—what will you do there?"

"Frankly, I do not know; I shall knock at every door."

"It is an excellent means to enter none. Have you some money?"

"Yes, fifty livres which have been stolen from me, and which I hope to recover along with my valise."

"And fifteen louis which I shall give you as your part of the booty."

"Eh? but that makes——"

"That makes fifteen louis. In war, as in love, what one loses is lost."

"Ah!"

"With three hundred and sixty livres you have just about enough to beat about the streets of Paris for two months, after which you will have the resource of making a lackey of yourself."

"I would rather throw myself into the river."

"That is not the way to ma ry Mademoiselle de Malzonvilliers."

"True. I can always make a soldier of myself."

"That is difficult. In the trade of arms you have twenty chances to get your head cracked and one to win epaulettes."

"Not many, to be sure."

"But at Paris, for two chances to make a fortune, you have twelve to die of hunger—unless you consent to practice certain trades which are repugnant to honest people."

"The 'not many' of just now is reduced to none."

"Ah! my friend, you have undertaken a rough job, in which courage and perseverance can only win in case accident places itself on their side."

"While waiting for its consent to do so, what do you advise me?"

"That is what we are mutually going to decide upon. Empty that bottle of old Burgundy. Wine brings counsel; it shows as easy the most extravagant things, and those are the only kind which are worth while attempting. When you wish to become a captain, you must think of becoming a general."

"General!" exclaimed Jacques, thoroughly astonished.

"Certainly if I was foolish enough to relish love, I would risk myself with princesses of the blood."

"Well, for a beginning, what do you say to incorporating me in the light-horse?"

"Eh! the uniform is pretty! If you take care to avoid the grape-shot, the bullets, the balls, the grenades, and other mischievous projectiles, if you are neither killed nor amputated, if you always conduct yourself valiantly, if you never get punished, if you distinguish yourself by some splendid action, and if luck smiles upon you, you can count upon the gold lace of a quarter-master at the age of forty-eight. You have to take care that a lieutenant does not take it into his head to look at you askew because you failed to salute him properly, in which case you would run the risk of remaining a brigadier up to your sixtieth year."

Jacques let fall his glass.

"It is neither you nor I who have made the world what it is, and it is not your fault if your father was not at least a chevalier. A prudent father, in the times in which we live, ought always to be born a count or a baron."

"Monsieur, I go to Paris," exclaimed Jacques, frightened.

"To Paris! eh! eh! it is an amiable city for rich and handsome young men; but when you have only the handsome part, it is well enough to avoid entering the cabaret. Gentlemen leave it tipsy, poor devils leave it plucked. Paris is a place where pleasures abound, only they cost very dear, above all those which cost nothing. It is true that when one is a handsome fellow, one has an additional chance. My faith, yes! Why the devil did I not think of it? One might please some dowager who places you then in her affections just between her spaniel and her confessor; in the morning you leave her apartment through the secret door. At the end of a month you are a boarder at the house in quality of secretary; you have a florid complexion, a vermilion mouth, and have the whole day to repose yourself."

Jacques made a gesture of disgust.

"No! then there remains to us the hope of becoming an intendant. Good trade! Do you know how to steal, Jacques?"

Jacques grew pale and stood up.

"Monsieur!" said he, in a voice strangled by emotion.

Monsieur d'Assonville looked at him without a muscle of his face trembling. Jacques ran his hands through the long curls of his blonde hair. A deep sigh came from his breast, and he sat down again.

"Pardon me, Monsieur le Comte," he said; "I did not expect this outrage from you who have slept in my father's arms! You have undoubtedly wished to punish me for having so promptly forgotten the distance which exists between us, but you have done it maliciously, Monsieur le Comte. You have no desire to come to my aid, I can well see. I will take counsel, then, of circumstances; but, whatever may come to pass and in whatever situation I find myself, believe me, never shall I forget that I have, for judging me, my God up yonder and my father here below."

"You are an honest and loyal fellow, friend Jacques, and I am proud to press your hand," replied Monsieur d'Assonville. "I have wished to prove you, and now that

I know your soul is as firm as your arm is strong, I will speak to you like a man. You have nothing to gain in the light-horse. Were you the best-informed, the boldest, and the most intelligent soldier in the company, the slenderest younger son sent from Paris by the court would pass over you. Neither would you gain anything at Paris. With a conscience tempered like steel, one never arrives at anything—unless to be duke and peer at the most. Remain a soldier—soldiers can preserve their honor pure—but enter the artillery. There alone a man who has valor, deportment, and some knowledge can push himself, even though he is not a gentleman. You have youth and a turn which is worth something. God will do the rest; there are a thousand accidents between you and the object, but Suzanne is at the end of the road! I have a brother who commands a company of sappers at Laon. I will give you a letter to him. He is my exact counterpart. Guillaume Grinedal's son will not leave the family."

Jacques took Monsieur d'Assonville's hands and kissed them without being able to speak. The next day, carrying in a purse the fifteen gold louis which the captain had given him, and mounted upon a good and well-equipped horse, he left the abbey.

"Here is the letter," Monsieur d'Assonville said to him; "if you experience some regret to quit me, I experience as much to lose you, but it is necessary for you to arrive at Malzonvilliers, and the shortest way passes through Laon. Go then to Laon. If ever you have need of me, you will find me. Adieu, my friend."

Jacques pressed the captain's hand and set spurs to his horse so as not to let him see that his eyes were filled with tears. He already had the pride of a soldier.

CHAPTER V.

THE INTERIOR OF A BARRACK.

Jacques arrived without hindrance at Laon. The first soldier whom he met pointed out to him the dwelling of Monsieur de Naucrais. No sooner than the captain recognized his brother's handwriting he gave orders to have the traveler introduced. Monsieur de Naucrais was a large man, severe and nervous; his gray eyes, shaded by thick, brown lashes, separated at their meeting point by a deep

wrinkle, shown with an extraordinary fire; a long tawny mustache divided his face made thin by the fatigues of war; he had, while speaking, the habit of twisting its sharp points between his fingers, without taking his eyes off the person whom he was questioning. This look, clear and keen as a steel point, seemed to penetrate to the inmost depth of consciences, and the most hardened felt themselves troubled by its fixity. Monsieur de Naucrais was two or three years younger than his brother and appeared to be three or four years older. The habit of command, and above all, his naturally imperious character, gave to his whole person an air of authority which overawed at the first glance. It was necessary to stop at the features of the face to find some resemblance between the two brothers. There was none in the physiognomy. Monsieur de Naucrais was holding Monsieur d'Assonville's letter in his hand when Jacques entered. He silently considered him for two or three minutes.

"You come from St. Pal?" the captain finally said.

"I left there a quarter of an hour ago."

"From what my brother remarks, you intend to make a soldier of yourself."

"Yes, captain."

"It is a trade in which there is more lead than money to gain."

"It is also the most honorable for a man of courage who wishes to push himself in the world."

"That concerns you; but I must warn you that in the artillery, and in my company, above all, one is a slave to discipline. At the first fault the awkward soldier is placed in the dungeon, at the second he is flogged by the line, at the third he is shot."

"I shall endeavor not to go to the dungeon, in order to be always far from the musket."

"That is your affair. You know the regime of my company—does it still please you to enter it?"

"Yes, captain."

"Monsieur d'Assonville speaks to me of you as a determined fellow. You have seen fire, he says, and have conducted yourself well under it."

"I have done my duty."

"That is well. Starting from to-day, you are a soldier in my company; recollect to always follow the straight line, and do not oblige me to punish you; I would do it pitilessly, so much the more that being recommended to me by my brother, I wish you to be worthy of my protection.

Your father's name engages me besides to redouble my severity as regards you; I intend to prove to him that you deserve to be his son."

Jacques prepared to reply; Monsieur de Naucrais stopped him with a gesture.

"Your name is Jacques," he continued.

"Yes, captain."

"It is a common name; we do not need it in the regiment. You will call yourself——"

"As you wish."

"Parbleu! that is the way I understand it! All soldiers have names."

"Yes, names which do not belong to them?"

"But that is the case with mine! Do you believe, perchance, that I need their consent to baptize them?"

"Is that also a part of the discipline'?' asked Jacques, blushing.

"Yes, my boy," replied Monsieur de Naucrais, who could not refrain from smiling. "But, mon Dieu, I have your name; it is written upon your face."

"Ah! Therefore I am to call myself——"

"Belle-Rose."

Monsieur de Naucrais rang his bell; a soldier entered, the captain whispered a few words to him, the soldier went out and returned five minutes after with a corporal of sappers.

"Monsieur Déroute," said Monsieur de Naucrais to the non-commissioned officer, "here is a recruit whom I confide to you; you will take him to the mess, instruct him in the profession, and render me an account of his conduct. Go."

In spite of his formidable name, Corporal Déroute was an excellent man who asked nothing better than to be of service to some one. When both of them were in the street, the corporal and the recruit, Déroute turned to our friend Jacques, now called Belle-Rose.

"It appears that you have been warmly recommended to the captain," he said to him; "he has never spoken so long apropos of a soldier."

"So long? a dozen words——"

"Eh! that is just three times as many as he is accustomed to pronounce. When a recruit reaches the company, Monsieur de Naucrais questions him, then he sends for a corporal, and pointing the man out to him, says to him: 'Here is a soldier, enter him,' and he turns his back. Oh! the captain is a terrible man."

"Bah!" said Belle-Rose, "I have seen him smile."

"He has smiled?"

"Like every one else! Does this never happen to him, then?"

"Yes, sometimes, but not often. I, who am an old member of the company, know that he has a better heart than countenance, but he has for recruits a devil of an air which frightens the most headstrong. If he wishes you well, you will soon arrive at the epaulettes."

"Advancement then is rapid among you?"

"That depends. Where the sieges kill a great many officers, it is necessary to replace them; then choice is made among the younger artillerymen or among the most skillful and valiant soldiers."

"So that, to win epaulettes, it is necessary for the enemy to scatter bullets among us."

"Which they do not fail to do."

"Those kind Spaniards!"

"Oh! our commander owes his grade to them. Therefore he has sworn to burn a taper in their honor in the very middle of Namur. Monsieur Delorme, who is at the head of the battalion, entered as a sapper like yourself. He has seen ten captains and three commanders pass over the river—three or four bullets and half a dozen grenades did the work."

"Faith, the sapper's trade is an excellent one."

"Very fine indeed. Only for one officer who loses a leg thirty soldiers lose their heads."

"Ah!"

"It is a calculation which I have amused myself with figuring out during my leisure hours. You can see it demonstrated at our first encounter."

Belle-Rose said nothing and scratched his ear; at the end of the street he turned to the corporal.

"Monsieur Déroute," said he, "do you permit me to address you a question?"

"Two if you wish."

"You have told me, I believe, that in the artillery one advances or one dies."

"Yes, comrade; the grape-shot serves as an aid to promotion."

"How long have you been in the service?"

"Eighteen years."

"The deuce you say!"

"That is an explanation which proves to me that your mind has just delivered itself to an arithmetical operation.

If it has taken the sapper Déroute eighteen years to become a corporal, how long will it take the sapper Belle-Rose to become a captain? That is what we call a rule of three. Have I guessed it?"

"To a nicety."

"Here the rule of three is wrong. Perhaps it will only take you three months to mount to the grade of sergeant. As to myself, I shall die a corporal. There is a particular reason for it. I have been a groom; now one of our young officers, Monsieur de Villebrais, who had seen me wearing the livery, has recognized me. They do not make an officer of a groom. If, thanks to the protection of Monsieur de Naucrais, I become a halberdier, that is as far as I shall get."

Déroute made this avowal with a simple and resigned air which touched Belle-Rose. The soldier took the corporal's hand and pressed it; then both arrived at the barrack. A uniform, a gun, a saber, a poniard, and a pair of pistols were given to the new-comer, and Belle-Rose, thoroughly equipped, mounted guard for the first time. The following day he was taught how to handle arms. At the end of a quarter of an hour the corporal perceived that in this respect the recruit was able to give lessons to the professor. On the day following the next he was placed in the first elements of calculation. Belle-Rose leaped over the four rules and suddenly reached regions where each figure was a letter. He answered problems by means of equations. The following day the corporal placed a piece of chalk between his fingers. While he was teaching him the principles of linear drawing, striving to demonstrate to him the difference which separates a parallelogram from a trapezium, Belle-Rose was scribbling on a slip of paper on the corner of the table. When the demonstration was finished, so was the scribbling, and the corporal laughed heartily on recognizing the locks of his black hair glued flat to his temples, and his pug nose between two eyes planted in Chinese fashion.

"Ah! you are a prince's son!" exclaimed the corporal throwing down his chalk.

"I have always held my mother for a very honest woman, and my father was a falconer "

The poor Déroute had studied under the sergeant professor, and as the opportunity presented itself; but Déroute only knew what it was necessary for a corporal of sappers to know. When Déroute was embarrassed, he began by reflecting, but when the embarrassment was ex-

treme, he wound up by going to his captain. On this occasion he went straight to Monsieur de Naucrais without even reflecting. The case was grave.

"Captain, you have placed an engineer in the mess," he said to him; "you have charged me with instructing Belle-Rose, and it is Belle-Rose who instructs his corporal. What must I do?"

"Send Belle-Rose to me."

After a short conversation, Monsieur de Naucrais engaged his brother's *protégé* to continue his studies in mathematics, and to join to them the study of languages.

"We are all more or less engineers or cannoneers," he said to him; "when you know thoroughly trigonometry and Spanish, you will not be far from the epaulettes. You will begin the lessons to-morrow."

Belle-Rose often studied the theory of the square of the hypothenuse and took upon paper a bastion defended by a telescope. Sometimes Suzanne's image came to confuse the angles, and the recollection of the promenades in the garden caused a sunken road to miss its effect; but Belle-Rose took up again the calculation and the siege, saying to himself that each figure and each assault drew him so much nearer his sweetheart. One fine day, toward noon, as he was leaving his room, mixing together in his mind love and mathematics, a soldier ran up against him on the stair-way.

"Devil take the awkward fellow!" exclaimed the soldier.

"It seems to me that it is you who have jostled me," said Belle-Rose. "I was passing to the right, you were mounting on the left, and you have run against me. Who is the awkward one, if you please?"

"'Pon my word! I believe he reasons! Do you mean to contradict me, young fellow?"

"In truth, I was wrong—I should not have said awkward, but insolent."

The soldier raised his hand, but Belle-Rose seized it in the air, and grabbing his adversary by the throat, he hurled him rudely down the stair-way. At the noise of this struggle, some sappers ran up, and seeing what was passing, rushed to the combatants in order to separate them. It was time; Belle-Rose had placed one knee upon the breast of the soldier, who was breathing hard.

"You shall follow me; a man who has such a strong hand ought to know how to hold a sword," said the soldier, after he had risen.

For sole reply, Belle-Rose made him a sign to go ahead. They noiselessly left the city and stopped in the country behind an old cemetery where no one passed. The adversaries threw aside their coats, and drawing their swords, began to fence. The soldier, who was a cannoneer named Bouletord, pushed Belle-Rose with so much fury that the latter was forced to break twice.

"Oh! oh!" exclaimed his enemy, "it appears that what you have retained best of your studies is the art of retreat."

Belle-Rose made no reply and continued to parry. He attempted—not being angry just now—to disarm Bouletord; but the cannoneer was too skilful to permit him to do it. In breaking a third time, Belle-Rose stumbled against a stone. Bouletord profited by the accident to make a thrust which would have pierced him through and through, if the sapper, returning quickly to parade, had not turned it aside. The sword glided along his body and tore his shirt, which was stained by some drops of blood. Peril returned to Belle-Rose some of his anger; in his turn he began to press Bouletord, who broke, but not quickly enough to avoid a thrust in the fleshy part of the arm. Belle-Rose kept on advancing; a second thrust wounded the cannoneer in the shoulder; he wished to parry, but a third time the sword of the sapper wounded his adversary and penetrated his breast. Bouletord tottered and fell upon his knees.

"I am done for, comrade," said he; and he fainted.

Belle-Rose, having returned to the barrack, related to Déroute what had taken place.

"It is unpleasant," the corporal said to him, "but it was inevitable."

Belle-Rose looked him in the face.

"Oh!" continued the corporal, "it is a part of the regimental manners! They have wished to sound you. Bouletord is a sounder. When a recruit enters the corps, a soldier provokes him; anything serves for a pretext under such circumstances; he gives or receives a sword thrust on account of it. If the recruit fights well, he has nothing more to fear, let him be victor or vanquished; but if he is afraid, he is lost. You have been made to pass through the baptism of steel."

"The duel is nevertheless forbidden."

"That is an excellent reason for its being fought all the more."

"But what is the result of it?"

"Nothing. Soldiers fight and the officers close their eyes."

"Therefore I have nothing to do."

"You have only to keep silence. Bouletord will be carried to the hospital and will say nothing; your two witnesses will be mute as carps; it is the soldier's religion. Perform your duties as if you were not concerned in the affair, and if Monsieur de Naucrais learns all about it, be sure that he will pretend to know nothing."

"But the surgeon will visit Bouletord?"

"The surgeon will say that Bouletord has the fever; if he gets well, it will be said that the fever has left him."

"And if he dies?"

"He will be dead of the fever."

Belle-Rose laughed.

"I do not laugh," continued the corporal; "I have already seen die in that fashion half a dozen sappers, and some of the malignant fever, others of the red fever. The red fever is a saber cut, the malignant fever is a sword thrust; it is the most dangerous. Fever is the soldier's providence. Go to bed."

CHAPTER VI.

LOST ILLUSIONS.

Everything passed off as Déroute predicted it would. Bouletord entered the hospital; the surgeon visited him and declared that he was sick of an intermittent fever. Monsieur de Naucrais feigned to believe what the surgeon had said, but meeting Belle-Rose alone one day upon the rampart, he brusquely said to him:

"I have been told that you recently came near contracting the fever. Take care, I do not like it to be given or received. I can, however, look over it for once."

"It has stopped," boldly replied Belle-Rose, "the attack has passed away."

Monsieur de Naucrais smiled. Bouletord got well, and nothing more was said about it. Some months passed, then a year, then two, then three; Belle-Rose wrote frequently to St. Omer; in the replies which he received from there there was always some souvenir from Suzanne, a word, a flower of the new season, something which came from the heart and went to the heart. Already the falconer's son had passed beyond Déroute; Monsieur de

Naucrais, who loved him in his way, was only waiting, he said, for an occasion to let him get wounded in the service of the king in order to ask the epaulettes for him. Belle-Rose prayed for a battle; but the Spaniards remained upon the frontier, peaceably ensconced in their quarters. After the generals the turn of the ambassadors had come. Instead of making war, they were carrying on negotiations. Louis XIV. had married.

Peace did not suit Belle-Rose; therefore he was much vexed. When Monsieur de Naucrais, the morning after the report was read, saw Belle-Rose care-worn, he asked him if the news was warlike.

"No," replied the sergeant; "it would be well-timed to give distaffs to the soldiers—at least, they would be good for something."

"Here is a droll fellow who, in order to light more quickly the nuptial torch, would willingly set fire to the four corners of Europe," Monsieur de Naucrais gayly responded.

But as soon as the sergeant became too gloomy, the captain confided to him the command of small detachments which were sent to serve in the fortifications at Bethune, Péronne, Amiens, St. Pal, and other towns in Picardy and Artois.

In the meantime Belle-Rose received a letter whose superscription made his heart beat; he had just recognized Suzanne's handwriting. It was the first time that she had written to him directly. There is in the first letter of the first woman you love an infinite sweetness which suffuses the eyes with divine tears. It brings an indefinable emotion which nothing can ever afterward replace; the fingers caress the paper, the lips touch it softly; there escapes from it a perfume which the soul inhales, and it is an enchantment whose recollection again makes warm the heart of the saddest old men. Belle-Rose kissed this letter a thousand times before breaking the seal, then he ran into the country in order to give to his confused but delightful sensations the silence which permits them to be enjoyed. When he had concealed himself in the shade of the lindens, far from the dusty paths along which rises the noise of cities, he tore open the envelope and read what follows:

"When you left St. Omer, my friend, you were eighteen and I fifteen; more than three years have rolled away since that time, and not a single day has passed without my thinking of you. The memory of you dwells in my heart as I live in yours; each time that your letters announce your progress and your advancement, I have rejoiced. I

felt happy at your success, and proud to have placed my affections on one who deserved them. In solitude my mind has matured, my friend. The future which we have dreamed of together, and which we have promised one another to reach, is still sweet to me, and it is toward it that my illusions turn when I wish to taste an hour of tranquil happiness. Hope lulls my heart as a mother does her child. Claudine, my friend, the confidante of my dreams, often animates them with her joyous words, and gives them all the deceitful hopes of reality. The dawn finds us oftentimes talking in low tones along the hedges where the birds chatter; many times the twilight surprises us still in the meadows, walking with clasped hands, and together we watch the golden bands extinguished, and gaze at the last smile of the sun which lights up the tops of the poplars. She has your name upon her lips and embraces me; it is in my heart, and I am silent. As to my father, he takes up his time in informing himself about the price of securities so as to increase his fortune, which I find too large already. He assures me that it is for my happiness, and I cannot make him hear reason on the subject. He purchases hay one day, and wheat the next—then he sells the whole at a large profit. It is for my dowry, he tells me. It is a strange thing; the persons who are most attached to us act according to their fancy when they believe they act for our good, and work to satisfy their own taste when they pretend to work for our happiness. I should like to lengthen this letter in order to delay the moment when I must talk to you about the affair which touches both of us most closely. But what good would result from it? Will it not always be necessary for me to force my mind to instruct you about it? Honesty requires it. When you shall have read this letter to the end, you will weep over me, over yourself, but you will pardon me. My will has submitted to the evil, it has not brought it about. You know my father's reply to your proposition; since that day he has never conversed with me about your love and your hopes; only, when the progress which you were making in the esteem of your chiefs was spoken of, he said that he was not astonished at it and that you were capable of succeeding in anything. At these times I felt an extraordinary desire to embrace him. Some time ago, M. de Malzonvilliers, on returning from a journey which he had made to Calais, introduced me to a young gentleman of good appearance. A secret instinct—an instinct of the heart no doubt—told me that this young seigneur did not come to Malzonvilliers on commercial affairs, and I felt my heart contract. This young nobleman had a very keen wit, and altogether the air of a man of good family; but you could see that he spoke before reflecting, and that above all he was occupied with pleasure and frivolous things. He remained eight or ten days at the chateau, during which it was impossible for me to go out walking with Claudine, unless I went in the morning very early, or in the evening while the stranger was paying a visit to the nobility of St. Omer. At the end of this time the gentleman went away: I scarcely had time to breathe when a grave seigneur replaced him at the chateau. The latter was as sedentary as the other was active; he had a kind disposition, and though suffering from old wounds, a noble and easy carriage. His discourse was playful, but always honest—his manners polite, and you felt attracted by the expression of his physiognomy, while at the same time you were seized with respect at the sight of his gray mustache and some scars which furrowed his bald forehead. This seigneur was

named M. d'Albergotti. He was a marquis, belonged to a family of Italian origin which had held a considerable rank in Milan, and wore the cordon of St. Louis. M. d'Albergotti had traveled much; his conversation was interesting, his kindness touched me, and I experienced some sorrow when he quitted Malzonvilliers to go to Compiégne, where M. de Tureune had summoned him. He had only left the evening before, when my father, taking me by the arm, drew me into the garden. You know that such is not his habit; as soon as he has an hour to spare, he shuts himself up in his room, and immediately one or two sheets of paper are covered with figures. Therefore I looked at him in astonishment; he began to laugh.

"'Oh!' he said to me, 'I have serious things to speak to you about.'

"This prelude increased my surprise, and without knowing why, I was afraid.

"'I have thought of marrying you to some one,' continued my father; 'you have just seen your two suitors.'

"'The Comte de Pomereux and M. d'Albergotti!' I exclaimed more dead than alive.

"'You are right, my child.'

"I believe that if my father had not sustained me, I should have fallen.

"'You are a little fool,' he continued, making me sit down upon a bench. 'Has marriage then something frightful for you? I do not pretend, besides, to dictate your choice. You will choose between the count and the marquis.'

"I was thunderstruck and knew not what to reply. Some tears gushed from my eyes, and I concealed my head between my hands. My father tapped the ground with the end of his cane.

"'Come, my daughter, be reasonable,' he resumed; 'I love Jacques a great deal, and I am ready to prove it to him; but, in conscience, you cannot marry him.'

"I will not repeat to you all he said to bring me to his opinion; I heard nothing and saw nothing but you, who seemed to be standing in front of me.

"'Lastly,' he added in conclusion, 'you will be a marquise or a countess, and that is a consolation.'

"'I promised to wait for him!' I exclaimed, suffocated by tears.

"'Eh! here is another folly!' replied my father, and thereupon he said to me many things which I did not comprehend at the time, but which have since returned to my memory, and which I will not relate to you at length. He spoke of our fortune and of the happiness I would enjoy in being rich and titled; all this was said without malice and in the best faith in the world. When M. de Malzonvilliers left me I was like one stupefied. At the end of an hour my troubled spirit had grown calm, and I promised myself to never marry any one but you. Toward evening, thoroughly resolved to follow my projeet, I went to your house to relate to Claudine what had taken place. It was your father who received me. What came over me, my friend, when I heard him exhort me to forget you! I resisted; then, taking my hands in his, and bowing his forehead loaded with white hair before mine, he implored me to obey M. de Malzonvilliers; in the name of his own honor and also in the name of yours, Jacques! He did not wish the accusation to be brought against him of having tolerated our mu-

tual affection, nor did he wish it supposed that you had been guilty of having abused my father's confidence in the hope of marrying me in order to increase your fortune. He assured me that never would he consent to the union of his son with a person who would choose him against the will of her family. I have seen this old man weep, my friend, and I have gone away thoroughly upset. In my loneliness I have thrown myself at the feet of an old priest, my confessor. He has listened to me with pious charity. 'Raise your soul to God,' he has said to me, 'and make him an offering of your grief; children owe obedience to their parents.'

"For one moment I thought of taking the vail; but I understood that if I gave myself to God, I was lost to you. Just at the moment I was most worried your sister came to me. She was no longer the laughing and frolicsome girl whom you have known, Her eyes were red with weeping. 'Suzanne,' she said to me, 'it is your duty to obey. He loves you too well not to pardon you.' My father came up. I understood that he was expecting my reply: I threw myself weeping into his arms. He kissed me on the forehead; his joy was my only consolation at that supreme hour. 'Whom have you chosen?' he said to me. Alas! I had not even thought of that! The two gentlemen presented themselves to my mind. M. de Pomereux was young and handsome, the other was old and suffering. I did not hesitate. 'M. d'Albergotti,' I replied. My father appeared astonished, but he did not manifest his surprise otherwise than by a movement of the lips. 'So be it,' said he, 'I am going to write to him.' Two days after M. d'Albergotti returned to Malzonvilliers. 'I owe you some gratitude,' he said to me; 'but be assured that I will endeavor to give you as much happiness as you could hope for from a father.' His voice and the look which accompanied these words touched me deeply, and I placed my hand in his. Have courage, my friend; honor and duty commanded me to do what I have done; you will suffer with me without condemning me. We will accustom ourselves to think of each other only as a brother thinks of a sister. You will be mine, and none other than you and my husband shall enter a heart which has taken refuge in God. Farewell, Jacques, in three days I will be the wife of another; it will no longer be permitted me to write to you. Through pity, do not despair; your despair would render me mad, and even now I hardly possess enough reason to exhort you to the sacrifice. But is not my part the most bitter? You remain free—free to love—and I am enchained. SUZANNE."

When Jacques finished this reading, he arose. His face was as white as a taper; no tear dimmed the feverish brilliancy of his glance; he, who was easily moved, remained impassible while facing this profound grief which lacerated his entire being. He walked with a quick but firm step toward the house of Monsieur de Naucrais and entered. The captain was at work. At the name given him by the sapper on guard, Monsieur de Naucrais, without turning around, asked Belle-Rose what he wanted.

"A leave," replied the sergeant.

"Hey!" said the captain. "You wish a leave?"

"Yes, monsieur."

The captain quitted his desk. If the voice of Belle-Rose had appeared altered to him, the expression of his countenance had astonished him.

"What is the matter with you?" he said to him.

"I must leave for St. Omer."

"To-day?"

"This moment."

"And if I do not wish to give you this leave?"

"I would recommend my soul to God, my body to Monsieur d'Assonville, and would afterward blow out my brains."

"There would perhaps be no great harm in that; it would be a task the less for my sapper."

"I am waiting, my captain," said Belle-Rose.

Monsieur de Naucrais eyed him a minute; he was a man who knew something about faces. The expression of the sergeant's made him comprehend that Belle-Rose had taken an irrevocable resolution, and that this resolution came from a violent shock. He loved the son of the old falconer more than he permitted it to be seen, therefore he came to an immediate decision.

"But what, then, is taking place at St. Omer?" said he.

"Mademoiselle de Malzonvilliers is to get married."

"Well! how does that concern you?"

"I love her."

"Ah! that is an excellent reason! Behind all the follies which men undertake, seek, and you find a woman. Come, Belle-Rose, what will you do at St. Omer?"

"I shall see her."

"And if she does not wish to receive you?"

"It will happen as God wills."

"This is frenzy! My brother and you yourself have related to me this story, but I had forgotten it. A soldier's love is an autumn flower."

Belle Rose looked at the clock; this movement did not escape Monsieur de Naucrais.

"Eh! my boy, we have only been talking a quarter of an hour. What is that?"

"It is an order."

The captain approached the table, wrote some words on a slip of paper, and signed.

"Go to the devil!" said he to Belle-Rose, giving him the paper.

But as Belle-Rose started to withdraw, he took his hand:

"You are the son of old Guillaume, my friend; do not

commit a folly; you would afflict Monsieur d'Assonville and myself. You have an honest soul, have a strong heart."

Belle-Rose pressed Monsieur de Naucrais' hand and rushed out of the room.

CHAPTER VII.

THE DROPS IN THE CUP.

A quarter of an hour after having quitted Monsieur de Naucrais, Belle-Rose, riding a post-horse, was flying at full speed over the route to St. Omer. At each relay he gave gold to the postilions. Belle-Rose fled like a bullet. When he perceived the steeple of St. Omer he had not said four words, but he had ridden down four horses. At the last relay he turned aside from the road and took his way through the fields in the direction of Malzonvilliers. The sounds of a bell came to him. Though it was not a holiday, no one was at work. This solitude and these confused tollings oppressed the sergeant's heart. He hastened on and reached the chateau in a breathless state. If silence pervaded the country, all was tumult and confusion at Malzonvilliers. All sorts of lackeys went and came, and the peasants were drinking and singing. Belle-Rose glided into the midst of this crowd which paid no attention to him; but, just as he was going to bound upon the terrace, the doors of the chateau opened wide, and a procession of richly costumed people appeared upon the threshold. The crowd uncovered themselves, the bells rang joyously, and Belle-Rose saw beyond the porch of a neighboring chapel, resplendent with a thousand lighted tapers. Before he had recovered from his emotion, the procession had passed under the porch vailed by the floating vapors of the incense. Belle-Rose followed it and concealed himself in a corner of the chapel. For some time he remained bowed like a young tree lashed by the wind; all the strength left to him he made use of in prayer to God. When he again raised his head, his first look fell upon the altar. A man with silvery hair, and a woman wearing a transparent vail, were kneeling upon velvet carpets. No sooner than he saw this woman, Belle-Rose's eyes were fixed immovably upon her. Drops of sweat beaded upon the soldier's forehead; his temples seemed bound in an iron vise, his ears tingled

like those of a drowning man. He could not have cried out if he had made an effort to do so; his throat was closed. The ceremony of the marriage was accomplished without his making any movement. There was no life in his body except in his eyes, and his eyes did not quit the altar. When they had received the nuptial benediction, the two spouses arose, and the young woman turned around. It was indeed she, Suzanne de Malzonvilliers, now Marquise d'Albergotti. Belle-Rose did not even tremble. What need had he to see her in order to recognize her? The procession soon took its way toward the porch; but this time the bride and groom marched at the head. The procession made the circuit of the chapel, the crowd parting before it; from the movement around him, Belle-Rose understood that Suzanne was advancing. He stood upright. A pillar, against which he had leaned, prevented him from recoiling. The bride and groom approached slowly; the long vail of Suzanne swept the floor, and her virginal beauty was displayed under its transparence. The nave was narrow; a corner of his sweetheart's dress brushed Belle-Rose; a sigh half parted his lips, and he leaned against the pillar. Suzanne raised her inclined forehead. Near her, and in the penumbra of the chapel, she caught a glimpse of a pale face in which blazed two eyes filled with the sinister flames of despair. Suzanne tottered. But before the cry which came from her soul had expired upon her lips, the procession had pushed her forward, and when she turned back, Belle-Rose had vanished like an apparition. A living rampart separated them. But while the crowd pressed with its thousand feet the sacred inclosure, Belle-Rose felt his heart and reason wandering. He did not think, he did not dream, he did not suffer; he was paralyzed. He remained immovable, his back resting against the pillar, his arms hanging listless beside him, his head inclined upon his breast, and no longer hearing anything but the dull throbbing of his heart. The crowd had long since left the chapel. The white image of Suzanne alone filled it for him.

At this moment the beadle passed, making his round. Seeing a man alone, standing against a pillar, he went to him and struck him on the shoulder.

"Eh! friend," said he, "the wedding has been over for some time; let me close the doors, then."

Belle-Rose raised his head and looked at the beadle. The poor man was troubled by this look. Great tears fell from the soldier's eyes and bathed his colorless cheeks.

"Diable!" said the other, "if you are sick, you should say so."

Belle-Rose had just perceived the country through the open doors of the chapel; at the same time he recollected everything, and, making no answer, he rushed out of the building.

He crossed the terraces, constantly running, and leaping over hedges and ditches, he advanced more quickly than a stag toward the house of Guillaume Grinedal.

The garden was deserted; he crossed it and pushed open the door of the house. A man turned round, and Belle-Rose fell at his feet.

"My father!" he exclaimed, and he fainted.

The father knelt down near his son. He was alone, Claudine and Pierre having remained at the chateau. The soldier was lying still; the violence of his emotions and the fatigue had exhausted his strength. Guillaume took him in his arms and laid him upon a bench fastened to the wall. Belle-Rose's heart beat, but his half-closed eyes stared vacantly. They had been together for more than an hour—the son speechless and cold, the father praying to God—when the door, pusned violently open, gave passage to two women enveloped in mantles. When the mantles fell, Guillaume recognized Suzanne and Claudine. Suzanne reached the bench with a bound, leaned over Belle-Rose, eyed him a moment, then turned to the old falconer. Her looks had a terrible eloquence. They were filled with all the terror, with all the remorse, with all the reproaches of the woman who loves. Guillaume understood this look.

"He lives," said he.

"But he is going to die," exclaimed Suzanne.

"God will spare me that trial," said the father.

"Oh! I was not deceived," said she; "it was indeed he! When I saw him so pale that he had the appearance of a corpse rather than of a living being, all my blood grew chilled. Oh, Guillaume, what have you exacted? Claudine, what have you made me do?"

It was no longer the same woman. All the reserve, all the calm, all the serenity of Suzanne had abandoned her; her disordered hair streamed over the bridal toilet; she was whiter than her dress; her lips quivered; she wrung her hands.

"But you see that he is dying!" she cried, falling upon her knees; "he has not even recognized me!"

Guillaume took pity on such a profound despair; he forgot his own grief to think only of Suzanne.

"Arise, madame," he said to her. "Recollect the name you bear, and no longer remain here, when no longer being able to do anything for his happiness, you may destroy yours."

"My happiness! And what matters to me my happiness?" said she, with a passionate ardor. "He suffers, he is unhappy, I shall remain here until he has heard me, until he has pardoned me. Oh! through pity, my father, leave me near him."

Guillaume had not the courage to drive her away, and both drew near Belle-Rose, whom Claudine was vainly calling.

"Jacques!" said Suzanne, in a low tone.

Jacques remained silent.

"My God! can he be dead, since he no longer hears even me?" said she.

Claudine turned to the door.

"Night is approaching," said she, "perhaps they are looking for you at the chateau."

"Let them come, then, Monsieur de Malzonvilliers and Monsieur d'Albergotti," she replied, in a somber tone. "My father has willed it."

"You destroy yourself and you will not save him!" said the father.

"But what, then, do you wish me to do?" exclaimed Suzanne, with clasped hands and tears in her eyes.

"We must separate," said a voice.

Suzanne and Claudine trembled; it was the voice of Jacques, and Jacques himself was seated upon the bench, still too weak to rise, but already too strong to remain stretched out.

"Jacques!" they mutually exclaimed.

"I thought I was going to die," said he. "I heard you, but could not speak. Now listen to me. You, Suzanne," he added, "you whom I call thus for the last time, you must return to the chateau."

Suzanne shook her head.

"It must be so," continued Jacques, "and I beg you to do so. I have indeed the right," said he, with a sad smile, "to ask a favor of you."

Suzanne bowed her head.

"Do you pardon me, Jacques?"

"I have nothing to pardon. You have obeyed your father and mine. I heard you just now, and I understood that your grief equaled mine; though you are banished

from me forever, you are still dear and sacred to me. Now farewell; you are the Marquise d'Albergotti."

"The name does not change the heart," said Suzanne. "If you had died on account of me, I should have killed myself.'

Jacques seized her hand, but just as he was carrying it to his lips with a convulsive ardor, Guillaume Grinedal stopped him.

"Madame d'Albergotti," said he, "your husband is expecting you."

The two lovers trembled from head to foot; their joined hands separated. The voice of Guillaume had awakened Suzanne as if from a dream. For an hour the lover had triumphed over the wife; it was now the wife's turn to triumph over the lover. Suzanne raised her forehead, over which passed a sudden blush.

"Farewell!" said she to Jacques. "You do not lose me entirely, the friend remains to you."

Jacques did not reply, and Suzanne went away on Claudine's arm. When they were alone, Jacques and Guillaume embraced each other.

Jacques passed the night under the falconer's roof, but at daybreak he left. Once more he received the paternal benediction upon the threshold of that door where, three years before, he had knelt down full of joy and hope, and which he now quitted full of bitterness and discouragement. Jacques did not take the route to Laon; like all wounded hearts he had need of affection; he thought of Monsieur d'Assonville and directed his course toward Arras, where the captain of light-horse was then garrisoned. A secret instinct told him that Monsieur d'Assonville was suffering like him, and that therefore he loved without hope. The sergeant found the young officer in a salon badly lighted by a slender ray filtered between thick curtains. Monsieur d'Assonville was walking in this large room, where the noise of his steps was stifled by a carpet. He was still the same handsome young man, whose intelligent head had an air of gentleness and pride which was charming. Only his look seemed sadder still, and the transparent pallor of his face was marbled by bluish tints under the eyelids. On seeing the soldier, Monsieur d'Assonville smiled.

"Welcome," he said to him. "Do you bring us this time sappers or cannoneers?"

"No, captain, I come alone."

"Alone! And what do you come for?"

Jacques did not reply. Monsieur d'Assonville, astonished, drew near him; a gust of wind which parted the curtains permitted him to see better the face of his *protégé*.

"My God! what is the matter with you?" he exclaimed.

"Suzanne is married!" replied Jacques.

Monsieur d'Assonville took his hand and pressed it.

"Poor Belle-Rose! you loved her, then. It must be so. Now, you suffer and you are alone. For six years I have wept."

Belle-Rose in his turn pressed the hand of Monsieur d'Assonville.

"You have a loyal and noble heart, and you ventured to place your life upon a woman's word," continued the captain. "I know how it is. When one takes a mistress at hazard and quits her as one loses a pistole at lansquenet, these things never happen. Only fools love, and we belong to those fools. I will not say to you to shake off your suffering as one shakes off the dust of the road, but you are a man and a soldier. Toughen yourself to the evil and wait; if you die from it, you must die standing."

"Yes, captain," replied Belle-Rose, in a firm voice, and passing his hands through his long and curly hair, he threw back his head.

Monsieur d'Assonville smiled.

"You are a brave and courageous fellow. If you so desired, twenty women would avenge you on your unfaithful sweetheart."

Belle-Rose shook his head.

"Suit yourself. But take care; you are too sad for them not to attempt to console you; if you avoid them, they will seek you."

Monsieur d'Assonville again took up his walk over the room. Each time that he passed before Belle-Rose he looked at him, and at each turn he looked longer than before. Finally he stopped before him.

"Do you wish to render me a service, Belle-Rose?" he said to him.

"I am yours body and soul."

"Will you do all I tell you?"

"All."

"And you promise me to keep silent at the price of your life?"

"I swear it."

"It is well. I am going to prepare your instructions; tomorrow you will leave for Paris."

CHAPTER VIII.

A HOUSE IN THE RUE CASSETTE.

Early the next day Monsieur d'Assonville ordered Belle-Rose into his apartment. Upon the table before which he was seated were to be seen some letters and divers scattered papers. The captain's pallor, his weary eyes, indicated that he had passed the entire night in writing.

"I have informed Monsieur de Naucrais that I need your services," said he to Belle-Rose. "Your responsibility as a soldier has ceased, and from day to day the prolongation of your leave will arrive. Are you ready to start?"

"At any time."

"Perhaps there will be some danger in executing the commission, and I must warn you of it."

"I only regret that this danger is not certain."

Monsieur d'Assonville raised his eyes to Belle-Rose, and giving him his hand, said:

"Leave sadness to those who no longer hope. You are twenty, Belle-Rose, and twenty is the age of pleasure."

"And you thirty, captain; thirty is the age of passions."

"You think so?" said the captain, with a smile. "It seems to me that I no longer have a heart." He was silent a moment, then he resumed: "God is supreme. Dismiss this and let us return to your journey. Here are three letters, my friend. Each of them contains a part of my life. Retain well what I am going to say to you. On your arrival at Paris, you will take lodging in a street near the Luxembourg. Toward evening you will go to the Rue Cassette, at the corner of the Rue de Vangirard, taking care to carry with you the smallest of these three letters. You will strike at a low door giving upon a court planted with trees. At the third knock the door will be opened. You will display your letter and ask the person who answers your call to deliver it to Mademoiselle Camille. Bear this name well in mind, for it is not upon the letter. If you are told that she has gone, insist on its being delivered to her brother Cyprien. The individual addressed will take the letter and you will withdraw, after having taken care to write plainly your name and address upon the envelope."

"Well—Camille and Cyprien."

"If, after three days, you have received no reply, you

will return to the Rue Cassette, and you will hand to the same person a second letter—this one."

"The one which is larger than the first and smaller than the third?"

"Precisely. You will wait three days longer. At the end of these three days, if you have seen neither valet nor note, you will take the last letter and carry it as you did the other two."

"And I will again ask for Mademoiselle Camille or Monsieur Cyprien, her brother?"

"Yes, only this time you will add upon the envelope these words: 'I leave in twenty-four hours.'"

"And shall I really leave?"

"Unless you prefer to stay in Paris."

"Then I shall leave."

"I do not think so. Certainly some one will come after the third letter, if not before."

"Mademoiselle Camille or Monsieur Cyprien?"

"One or the other, or perhaps both," said Monsieur d'Assonville, with a singular smile. "You will follow them and do everything they tell you."

"But how shall I recognize them?"

"By these words which Mademoiselle Camille will pronounce on accosting you: 'The Castilian is waiting.' Perhaps you will be informed by a note where these words will be found. This note will indicate to you a rendezvous, and you will go to it. There is no danger, only—take a poniard."

"Ah!"

"You will take care to always have the right arm free and ready to act."

"Ah! ah!"

"Oh, 'tis a simple precaution. When you shall have arrived at the place indicated and spoken to the person to whom I send you, you will repeat to me all that you have seen and heard at once and without a moment's loss of time."

"Is that all?"

"It is all. Leave now, and may God guide you and aid you."

Just as Belle-Rose was mounting his horse, Monsieur d'Assonville embraced him:

"Whether I live or die," he said to him, "I have your word; I count upon your silence."

Belle-Rose placed the three letters in his doublet, and took his departure. The agitation of his body calmed the

agitation of his mind; he made the journey to Paris at a gallop in order to repose himself. His first care, on arriving at Paris, was to stop at a small furnished lodging on the ground floor of a house in the Rue du Pot-de-Fer St. Sulpice. The apartment, which was composed of a room and a large closet, was genteel and had a view opening upon some gardens. Belle-Rose paid two weeks in advance, Monsieur d'Assonville having made it possible for him to cut a figure at Paris; then, drawing aside the proprietor, who was at the same time the concierge, he gave him a gold louis and recommended him to take care whom he admitted to see him. These manners won the innkeeper's heart; he doffed his cap.

"My gentleman," said he, "I have, though old, eyes to see, ears to hear, and a tongue to speak. You will be served as you desire."

"'Tis well. Only learn that I am not a gentleman."

"So much the worse; men formed like you deserve to be marquises by birth."

"You will call me Belle-Rose."

"I will call you as you wish; but you will not prevent me from saying that, if you are not really what I supposed, fate has acted like an ill-bred person."

Belle-Rose threw a cloak around his shoulders, slipped the smallest of the three letters into his pocket, and went out.

"All the same," said the landlord, following him with his eye as he went along the walls of the Rue du Pot-de-Fer St. Sulpice, "he has wished to disguise himself—and that is his affair; but you cannot convince me but what he is a great lord. What a figure!"

This exclamation answered his thought. It said: "What a louis!"

Things happened as Monsieur d'Assonville had announced to Belle-Rose. The low door opened only at the third knock; a woman, muffled in a head-dress which descended in front even to her eyes, and behind even to her neck, appeared upon the threshold. She cast upon Belle-Rose a keen glance which embraced him from head to foot, then lowered her eyes, crossed her arms, and waited. The house was full of cracks, shaky, and covered with moss. This house must already have been old in the time of the League; it had a discreet appearance, a devoted air, a mournful aspect. No stream of smoke issued from the chimneys, and the windows were closed. In the court grew enormous trees, and under their shade were

scattered marble vases of a precious workmanship, but soiled by lichen and void of flowers.

"This house is not to rent," said the woman.

"Therefore I did not come for that," replied Belle-Rose, who blushed slightly; "I have a letter here which I am charged to deliver to Mademoiselle Camille."

The woman threw another glance at Belle-Rose.

"She has gone," she then said, with eyes lowered.

"Will you hand this letter to her brother, then?"

Another glance glided between the eyelashes of this discreet person, and was promptly extinguished.

"What brother?"

"Monsieur Cyprien."

The woman extended her hand, took the letter, saluted, and shut the door in Belle-Rose's face.

The third day, Belle-Rose was halted by the landlord just as he was about to unlock his room.

"There is a letter here for you," he said to him.

"Ah! ah!" said the sergeant, thinking that the reply had not been delayed as long as the captain thought it would.

"Where is this letter?"

"Here it is."

"Eh! eh!" said Belle-Rose, reading the address, "it appears that they know my name, title, and rank. It is indeed this: 'Belle-Rose, Sergeant of Sappers in the Regiment of La Ferté.'"

The host smiled shrewdly.

"Yes; they suspected—like myself," said he.

The letter was inclosed in an envelope sealed with red wax. Belle-Rose broke the seal and quickly threw his eyes over the paper. This is what it contained:

"Sergeant Belle-Rose has violated discipline by quitting his company without permission. In order to recall it to him, said sergeant will be placed under arrest eight days on his return to the corps; but in order to excuse his absence he will find inclosed the commission of recruiting sergeant and the instructions which are incident to this new grade. Sergeant Belle-Rose is authorized to remain a month at Paris or elsewhere, if need be. Le Vicomte Georges de Naucrais."

"This is again kindness disguised," murmured Belle-Rose; and on the following day he entered on his functions.

Each evening Belle-Rose asked him if any one had come.

"No one," replied the good man, and for fear that some

one might come in his absence, Monsieur Mériset remained seated in a small salon near the door, from morning to evening.

The third day, Monsieur Mériset ran to Belle-Rose as soon as he saw him. For an hour the inhabitants of the Rue du Pot-de-Fer St. Sulpice had seen Monsieur Mériset promenading before his door and drawing out his watch every minute. The honest landlord accosted Belle-Rose, cap in hand, with an air at the same time mysterious and delighted.

"Well, Monsieur Belle-Rose?" said he.

"Well, Monsieur Mériset."

"Some one has come."

"Ah! ah! a lady or a gentleman?"

"A young lord richly dressed, with a mustache turned up at the corners, a pointed nose, and a distinguished appearance."

"He has inquired after me?"

"Certes, yes, without saluting, as gentlemen do. 'My good fellow,' he has said to me, 'is Belle-Rose here?' 'No, monseigneur,' I have replied, standing with hat in hand. By his easy air I understood at once that I was dealing with a gentleman of the court. 'Au diable!' he continued. 'You will tell him that I wish to see him. I shall expect him to-morrow.'"

"Did he tell you his name?"

"No."

"His address?"

"No."

"Where the devil, Monsieur Mériset, shall I find him?"

"Oh, he has said nothing to me, he has written everything to you."

"Well and good, Monsieur Mériset, this is what you should have stated in the beginning."

Belle-Rose found upon a table a slip of paper, and upon this slip of paper these words:

"Gaspard de Villebrais."

"My lieutenant!" he exclaimed, "what can he want with me?"

The simplest way, for knowing, was to go to the lieutenant's lodging; this is what Belle-Rose did the next day. Monsieur de Villebrais informed him that he was at Paris on his own business, and at the same time on that of the company.

"I will attend to mine, and I depend on you to look after the other," he added. "If you need me, you will find

me every day, from one to two o'clock, at the tennis court, near the Luxembourg, and from three to four at the Place Royale. It is there that the best society goes. Adieu, I am expected elsewhere."

"From one to two at the Luxembourg, and from three to four at the Place Royale. 'Tis well; I shall recollect it to the extent of not going there," said Belle-Rose to himself as he went away.

This lieutenant was a man of a haughty and irascible disposition whom all his subordinates detested.

The following day, the sergeant returned to the Rue Cassette and struck at the low door. The same lady opened and this time took the letter at the first word.

"Well!" said Belle-Rose to himself. "At our first interview she spoke five or six words; to-day she has not spoken more than two; at the next interview she will not say anything at all. This singularly abridges the negotiations."

Belle-Rose kept Monsieur d'Assonville constantly advised of his actions, and the rest of his time he beat about the city, recruiting heroes at six sous per day for His Most Christian Majesty's artillery. Between the letters and the promenades Belle-Rose thought constantly of Suzanne. He could not accustom himself to call her Madame d'Albergotti. But if his love was as profound as ever, the recollection of it was less bitter. The sentiment of duty, all powerful in his soul, made him excuse the conduct of Mademoiselle de Malzonvilliers, who had given way only to the paternal authority. When he passed through the quarter of the Palais-Royal, through the Rue St. Honoré, through the public gardens, his handsome appearance and his youth attracted the looks of all the prepossessing grisettes and of a great many great ladies, also. But looks and smiles glided over a heart tenanted by regret. Three days after the sending of the second letter, Belle-Rose perceived, as he entered the Rue du Pot-de-Fer St. Sulpice, the worthy Monsieur Mériset walking before his door with a hurried step. He drew off his cap, placed it on again, stopped, looked behind him and before him. His feet scarcely touched the soil, and his lips, tightly contracted, seemed to have some trouble to contain a stream of words ready to escape.

"Eh! eh!" said he, quite low, to Belle-Rose, and with the most mysterious air in the world, "there is something new."

"A letter?"

"Better than that."

"A visit."

"Exactly. A visit such as the greatest gentleman of our glorious king would be pleased to receive."

"It is a woman, then?"

"And one of the prettiest—brown eyes, soft and brilliant, hair like silken threads, a slender little nose, lips to shame the freshest roses, and what teeth! Ah! my gentleman, how willingly one would change one's self into a cherry to be bitten by those teeth!"

"Monsieur Mériset, poetry has made you forget my rank; no gentility, if you please."

"He persists in it," thought the honest landlord. And he continued, aloud: "For fifty-two years I have been living in the Rue du Pot-de-Fer St. Sulpice, and never before did I see a similar face."

"What is she—a soubrette?"

"A soubrette! ah, fi! with that figure of a great lady—she is a marquise."

"Did she tell you so?"

"I guessed it."

Belle-Rose smiled, having a personal experience of his host's perspicacity.

"Agreed that she is a marquise," said he. "At least she has told you something?"

"Certainly. She told me that she would return."

"Ah!"

"Then she has gone away again in the chaise which brought her."

"Without saying anything?"

"Faith no; but I understood from her air that she was vexed because she did not get to see you."

Belle-Rose did not for a moment doubt but what the marquise of his host was an emissary from the Rue Cassette. Consequently the next day he remained at home all day and waited. No one appeared. It was the same the following day. Belle-Rose returned to his recruits.

"Parbleu!" said he, "if any one wishes to see me let them write to me. There are pens for everybody."

As he was returning two days after, toward evening, he saw at the end of the street a carriage standing still; a woman was standing before the portière, and by the woman's side a man was bending over, his cap in hand. This man was Monsieur Mériset. The intelligent landlord perceived Belle-Rose with the corner of his eye and made him an imperceptible sign to induce him to make haste. Belle-

Rose did hasten, but the woman jumped quickly into the carriage, the coachman whipped his horses, and the equipage disappeared down the Rue Vangirard. Monsieur Mériset stamped, which with him denoted a violent annoyance.

"Five minutes sooner, and you held her!" he exclaimed.

"It was she, then?"

"No."

"Who, then?"

"Another."

"Young, old, ugly, or pretty?"

"Perhaps one, perhaps the other. I do not know."

"Nevertheless you saw her."

"Not at all. She had a large black vail over her face."

"What! you have seen nothing?"

"Nothing, save the foot."

"Ah!"

"The foot of a duchess!"

"Parbleu! But tell me Monsieur Mériset, had this duchess, like the marquise, a vexed air because she did not meet me?"

"On the contrary. That is at least what I said to myself on seeing her jump into the carriage."

"That is just. She did not come, then, to speak to me?"

"Not altogether. She came to inquire."

"And what did you answer, Monsieur Mériset?"

"Ah! ah! I am not a fool, though I look like one. I let her talk and said nothing."

"Quite sure?"

"As true as my house is an honest house. It was not because she did not wish to tempt me, and this purse given me proves well enough with what intentions she had come."

"Eh! what! you have accepted it?"

"I accepted it and was silent. A house has always need of repairs; but the repairs do not oblige me to speak. Vainly she tried to find out who you were, what you did, whence you came—I have been as mute as this cap. You charmed me at the first sight, and there is nothing I would not do for you. Nevertheless, I must acknowledge that my discretion has perhaps less merit at bottom than in appearance. I have said nothing, 'tis true, but I also knew nothing."

"I will not cavil about the fact, the intention suffices."

"Oh! the intention was excellent and will always be so."

Belle-Rose believed it his duty to reward this good in-

tention in order to maintain it in the sentiment of honesty, and as the person had not said she would return, he did not give himself the trouble to wait for her next day. For once, Belle-Rose knew not what to think of these two visits; it was not probable that they both came from the Rue Cassette, and as, on the other hand, he did not know any woman in Paris, he could only make vain suppositions. After having tortured his mind in a thousand ways, he took the very wise part of leaving to the future the task of explaining this adventure. The day for his third trip to the house in the Rue Cassette had come. The result was such as he had foreseen. The lady took the letter this time without observation. The next day Belle Rose installed himself at home and waited. The hours passed; no one appeared. Evening came. At all hazards, Belle-Rose packed his clothing so as to be ready to leave at daybreak and went out to dine at a restaurant in the Rue du Bac, where he was accustomed to take his meals. As he left it, a crowd of artisans and shopkeepers stopped him at the corner of the Rue de Sèvres; through lack of nothing to do he mingled with the crowd who were making a great fuss about a sedan bearer who was quarreling with a bourgeois. All at once a hand seized his arm and a woman's voice pronounced distinctly these words in his ear: "The Castilian is waiting." Belle-Rose trembled, but when he turned round, none but workmen were near him. He only felt a paper which the hand of the unknown had slipped into his. He made haste to leave the group and directed his course toward the Rue du Pot-de-Fer St. Sulpice in order to read the note. Just as he pushed open the door, a woman came out. She stopped brusquely. A stream of light fell upon the face of Belle-Rose.

"My brother!" exclaimed the woman.

"Claudine!" replied Belle-Rose, and he received his sister in his arms.

CHAPTER IX.

A FRIEND AND AN ENEMY.

Belle-Rose drew Claudine into his apartment and shut the door in the face of Monsieur Mériset, who was bowing and scraping, torch in hand.

"It is the marquise," murmured the honest landlord, returning to his lodge, "and he calls her his sister."

After the first caresses, Belle-Rose made Claudine sit down upon a sofa. He experienced a strong desire to address her a question, the only one dear to his heart, a question summed up by a name. An incredible emotion prevented him from doing so. He took a roundabout way to arrive at his object.

"Have you not been here before?" he said to Claudine.

"I was here some days ago. But since then it has been impossible for me to return."

"Why did you not leave your address?"

Claudine appeared embarrassed for a moment.

"I could not," she presently said.

"And why?"

"Because you would have come to see me."

Belle-Rose understood. He lowered his eyes, and Claudine took his hand.

"You did not come to Paris alone, then?" said he.

Claudine shook her head.

"Suzanne is in Paris!" said Belle-Rose. "I am here, and were it not for you I should have been ignorant of her presence."

"Oh, do not blame her! When she left Malzonvilliers to follow her husband, who was called to Paris on important business, she begged me to accompany her. I was unable to refuse her. She is so unhappy!"

"Unhappy!" exclaimed Belle-Rose.

"God and I alone know what she suffers. Monsieur d'Albergotti does not know. When he is present, she smiles; when he is gone, she weeps."

Belle-Rose concealed his head between his hands.

"On reaching Paris some days ago she fell sick—oh, she is out of danger," said Claudine, on seeing her brother's emotion; "it is she who sent me here to you——"

"Oh! I shall go to see her, to thank her——"

"No, do not come. Your presence would kill her."

"She has not forgotten me, then?" exclaimed Belle-Rose, with that profound accent given by the egotism of love.

"Forgotten? If you were, Jacques, would she still be so sad and disconsolate? Your name is not upon her lips, but it is in her heart."

Both were silent. A bitter joy filled the soul of Belle-Rose; Claudine almost repented having spoken. What happiness could come from this revived love? Drawing her handkerchief from her pocket, she dried her humid

eyes, pushed back the hair which vailed her child-like forehead, and smiled.

"Brother," said she, "I came to embrace you and not to weep. Let us dismiss this conversation which would redden my eyes—something which I am not in a humor to permit—and take my arm to conduct me to my lodgings. I wish to talk of your affairs as we go along."

It is quite a distance from the Rue du Pot-de-Fer St. Sulpice to the Rue de l'Oreille, where the Hôtel d'Albergotti was situated. As they walked along the Rue du Bac and the quays, we would not vouch for the fact that Belle-Rose did not pronounce twice or thrice the name of Suzanne; but Claudine turned aside the conversation from this dangerous ground and brought it back to things more in conformity with her humor.

"When shall I see you again?" Belle-Rose asked his sister, on leaving her in front of the hotel.

"Day after to-morrow, if you wish. At eleven o'clock, I shall be at the Porte St. Honoré."

"Well, I shall be there at ten."

Belle-Rose had, thanks to his sister, forgotten the note mysteriously slipped into his hand. His first care, immediately on his return to the worthy Monsieur Mériset's, was to learn the contents of it. He found only these words:

"Next Saturday, Belle-Rose will meet, an hour after sunset, at the Porte-Gaillon, a person who will say to him the words agreed upon; let him follow this person, and he will arrive where Monsieur d'Assonville sends him."

He recollected then that this was the day on which he was to wait for his sister at the Porte St. Honoré. For a moment he thought of writing to her to take back his promise; but, like a well-informed man, he understood that matters could be arranged. To his sister he would give the day; to the affairs of Monsieur d'Assonville the evening. Belle-Rose was punctual at the rendezvous; his sister and he mounted a fiacre and took their way to Neuilly. After having vainly sought a lodging at the Porcherons, which a company of musketeers had invaded, Belle-Rose, just as the fiacre was passing over the causeway, heard a voice which called him by name. He leaned toward the portière, and saw, at the window of a cabaret, a gentleman saluting him who held a glass of champagne in his hand.

"Good luck to you, Belle-Rose!" said he.

"Who is that gentleman?" Claudine asked her brother, who had bowed his head.

"Monsieur de Villebrais, my lieutenant."

After having driven about some time in the environs, Belle-Rose and his sister made the fiacre deviate from the main road. There was at the end of a meadow a house, before which some beautiful trees extended their shade; this house had the appearance of a farm-house. Hoping that in this out-of-the-way place dinner could be served to them, Belle-Rose ran to it, leaving his sister some distance away.

As he was returning, beating the bushes with a cane which he held in his hand, he heard frightened cries, in which his own name was mixed. He hurried on and saw Claudine struggling in the hands of a cavalier. In a bound, Belle-Rose had reached them.

"Eh! parbleu! come on," exclaimed the cavalier. "You will aid me to make this pretty child understand that I am not a peasant."

The cavalier had not finished his phrase, when Belle-Rose, snatching Claudine from his arms, placed himself between them.

"Monsieur de Villebrais," said he, "this child is my sister."

"Your sister? Word of honor, 'tis charming. You are very spiritual, Belle-Rose."

"My lieutenant!"

"Your sister? Does one ride about with one's sister? I have a sister, too, but she is at the convent, my dear sir."

"Monsieur de Villebrais, I have told you the truth. Claudine——"

"Ah! her name is Claudine, your cousin or your mistress; both, perhaps. It is a pretty name, altogether in the pastoral taste. Say, then, my charmer, if you wish my heart, I offer it to you; it is vacant for twenty-four hours."

Belle-Rose barred the way to Monsieur de Villebrais; but it was out of the question to make a man hear reason who had dined altogether too well. Turning, then, to the coachman, who was looking on philosophically, he cried to him to turn his team in the direction of Paris. The chevalier immediately threw a purse at the coachman's feet.

"Count that money, rascal," he said to him, "and when you have finished, whistle your most beautiful airs."

The coachman picked up the purse, sat down upon a block of stone, and began to count. He had not reached

the third crown when he whistled with all his strength. Claudine looked wildly turn by turn at the coachman, her brother, and the chevalier.

"That is an intelligent coachman," said Monsieur de Villebrais. "Be not less amiable than he, my friend; your mistress is pretty and pleases me; for three or four hours you have been wandering around together. Each in his turn, get you away from here."

Belle-Rose looked at Monsieur de Villebrais. The chevalier was strongly animated, but his legs were still steady, his voice clear, his gestures easy; the sergeant was not dealing then with a drunken man, but with a headstrong officer. The quarrel then became more grave.

"Come, my dear sir, have you understood?" said the chevalier. "Turn about, run to the Porcherons, ask for the cabaret of the Pomme de Pin, and dine freely at my expense."

"My lieutenant, I shall not go."

"You wish to remain."

"Yes."

"Ah! scoundrel, do you forget who I am?"

"On the contrary, I wish to recollect it."

"Ah! you jest. I will cut off your ears."

"I do not believe it."

Monsieur de Villebrais raised his arm, and Belle-Rose seized it.

"What! you dare touch me, rascal? I am going to give you a sword thrust in the stomach," exclaimed Monsieur de Villebrais, who, losing all control of himself, made an effort to free his hand and take his sword; but Belle-Rose pushed him back so quickly that he tottered over.

Before he could arise, the sergeant had already drawn his sword.

The coachman had stopped counting, but he was still whistling.

"Monsieur de Villebrais, I swear to you that you will only reach my sister after having passed over my dead body!" exclaimed Belle-Rose.

"I will not fight with you, but will get you hung," replied the lieutenant. "Eh! coachman," he added, "there are ten louis for you if you aid this adorable girl to mount in the fiacre, and ten more if you take her to the Pomme de Pin, where I will soon rejoin her."

Claudine wished to fly, but she tottered and fell upon her knees.

"Done," said the coachman.

"Not yet!" exclaimed some one near by, and at the same moment an unknown man made his appearance.

He was a handsome young fellow, with a firm and candid expression of countenance. His costume, void of ribbons and embroidery, gave him the appearance of a student, but he had the bearing and the sword of a gentleman.

"What did you say?" interposed Monsieur de Villebrais, "and in what are you mixing?"

"I said what I wished, and I mix in the affairs of others when it pleases me," the unknown gravely replied.

Upon a gesture from the lieutenant, the coachman, who was hesitating since the unexpected intervention of the cavalier, advanced toward Claudine. He had not made two steps when the hand of the unknown was placed upon his shoulder.

"Listen," he said to him. "This gentleman has promised you ten louis to carry mademoiselle to the Porcherons. I promise you a hundred stripes across your back if you do not take her to yonder farm-house; but I will join my invitation to that of monsieur to ask you to aid her to mount the fiacre. Do you understand?"

"Quite well," said the coachman, who felt, from the manner in which the cavalier's hand was placed upon his shoulder, that there was no objection to make to a man so full of eloquence and vigor. A new conviction had just penetrated his mind, and like a zealous neophyte he ran to open the portière, wishing, by his zeal, to demonstrate the warmth of his conversion.

"Enter, mademoiselle," said the unknown, presenting his hand to Claudine; "I answer to you for the good sentiments of this honest coachman. Am I right, friend?"

"You do me too much honor," replied the coachman, who rubbed his shoulder as he closed the portière.

The intervention of the stranger had been so rapid, action had so promptly followed words, that Monsieur de Villebrais and Belle-Rose had remained mute spectators of this scene. But when Claudine sat down in the fiacre, Monsieur de Villebrais felt all his anger blaze up again. He rushed upon Belle-Rose, sword in hand, and made such a furious thrust that it would have pierced him through and through, if Belle-Rose, at the noise of his steps, had not thrown himself to one side. The blade ripped the sergeant's clothes and glided along his shoulder; but thanks to the quickness of his movement, the flesh was untouched.

"You practice assassination also, monsieur?" said the stranger, while the coachman urged on his horses in the direction of the farm-house with an unparalleled ardor.

Monsieur de Villebrais grew pale at this insult.

"On guard, monsieur!" he exclaimed, in a voice choking with fury, and he rushed upon the unknown.

"You forget me, I believe," said Belle-Rose, and in a bound he was between the lieutenant and the stranger.

"If your adversary would give way to me," said the latter, without even touching the guard of his sword, "I should willingly consent to do you the honor to measure swords with you, monsieur; but I will call your attention to the fact that you owe him the preference."

"Fight with a clown, never!"

"Nevertheless you will have it to do."

"And who will force me to do so?" said Monsieur de Villebrais, disdainfully.

"I, who am ready to strike you upon the cheek with the flat of my sword, if you hesitate."

Monsieur de Villebrais bit his lips till the blood came.

"Listen, then, monsieur," continued the stranger, in the same tone and without appearing more moved than if it were a question of a supper. "When one passes from rape to murder with such a surprising facility, some unpleasantness must be expected. The trade is not altogether a profitable one."

The shame of the action which he had committed, and the rage inspired in Monsieur de Villebrais by these words, triumphed over the pride of blood.

"So be it," he replied. "I will fight with this clown, and it shall be your turn afterward."

"Willingly, if necessary."

Monsieur de Villebrais was already trying the ground with his foot, when the stranger resumed:

"Since you yield to my observations with such a laudable complaisance, permit me, monsieur, to address you a new one. This is not a suitable place to fight. We run the risk of being disturbed, which is always disagreeable. I see down yonder a little clump of trees which would do marvelously well. Does it please you to go there?"

"Come," replied Monsieur de Villebrais.

The three young men entered the grove, and the two adversaries crossed blades immediately. Monsieur de Villebrais fought like a man who wishes to kill and neglected none of the resources of fencing. But he was dealing with a man as determined as he and more skillful. At the third

pass Monsieur de Villebrais was disarmed. Belle-Rose broke guard.

"Tell me, monsieur, that you regret all this, and I will think no more about it," he exclaimed.

Monsieur de Villebrais had already picked up his sword; without making any answer, he again fell on guard. Belle-Rose had recovered enough *sang-froid* to recollect that the man whom he was facing was an officer. He would have preferred, then, to confine himself to parrying, but Monsieur de Villebrais pushed him so roughly that he was forced to give thrust for thrust. The clashing of steel animated him, and a thrust which scratched him succeeded in making him lose all circumspection. Two minutes after his sword penetrated the breast of Monsieur de Villebrais. Monsieur de Villebrais wished to return the thrust, but the blade escaped from his hand, a stream of blood mounted to his lips, and he fell upon his knees. The stranger raised him and leaned him against a tree.

"It may be that he will not get over it, monsieur," said he to Belle-Rose; "begin by leaving; we will arrange the affair after."

"This man is my lieutenant," replied Belle-Rose, his reddened sword in hand.

"Ah, diable!" said the unknown; "it means that you are in danger of being shot. Leave all the more quickly, then."

"And my sister?"

"I answer for her."

"You swear it."

"Here is my hand."

The hands of the two young men met in a fraternal clasp.

"Leave," said the stranger, "and count upon me."

"You have aided my sister, monsieur. Your name, I pray you, in order that I may know to whom my gratitude is due."

"My name is Cornelius O'Brien, and I am from the county of Armagh, Ireland."

"I am from St. Omer, in Artois, and my name is Jacques Grinedal, otherwise called Belle-Rose, sergeant of sappers in the regiment of La Ferté."

"Well, Belle-Rose, you have a friend. Honest men know each other at a glance."

Belle-Rose once more pressed the hand of the Irishman and went away The shades of evening were beginning to extend themselves over the country when he left the

grove. The recollection of the rendezvous which awaited him at the Porte Gaillon suddenly returned to his mind. His personal safety required that he should leave in all haste before the rumor of his duel had spread. But Monsieur d'Assonville had his word.

Belle-Rose went straight to the Porte Gaillon. He had scarcely been there five minutes, when he saw arrive a small young man enveloped in a Spanish cloak. A gray felt hat, ornamented with a heron feather, shaded his forehead; the lower part of his face was concealed by a fold of the cloak. On seeing Belle-Rose, the young page walked rapidly toward him, and said, in low tones:

"The Castilian is waiting."

"I am your man," replied Belle-Rose.

The page threaded a somber alley, walked for some minutes, and then blew a small whistle attached to his neck by a silver chain. At this signal, a carriage arrived at the carrefour where the page had stopped; he jumped in and made a sign to Belle-Rose to mount after him. The portière was closed upon them, and the carriage moved off.

CHAPTER X.

A DAUGHTER OF EVE.

Scarcely had Belle-Rose seated himself in the carriage, when his guide lowered the silk curtains and threw himself in a corner. The carriage rolled on for an hour or two. It appeared to Belle-Rose that it was leaving Paris and plunging into the country, but it was impossible for him to recognize over what roads it was passing, or what direction it was following. His companion remained immovable and silent in his corner. All at once the carriage stopped, a lackey opened the portière, and the page, leaping to the ground, invited Belle-Rose to descend. They found themselves in a solitary place surrounded by great trees. The night was dark, but in the distance there was seen shining, between the foliage, a light as immovable as a star. The page entered a path, and Belle-Rose followed him. The light disappeared and reappeared turn by turn; the wind sighed and filled with melancholy noises the somber mass of forest. In proportion as the travelers advanced, the path contracted and was embarrassed by branches touching the soil. The brilliancy of the light

kept on increasing; each step drew them nearer to it. Soon, between the trunks of elms and birches, Belle-Rose distinguished the wavering outlines of a house, but at the same moment he saw, as in a dream, two black shadows pass and disappear behind some holly bushes. A little farther on the two shadows drew near the path. Dry twigs snapped under the pressure of invisible feet. Belle-Rose looked at his guide. He seemed to have seen and heard nothing. The presence of this mysterious escort suddenly recalled to Belle-Rose the last words of Monsieur d'Assonville; he thrust his hand under his cloak; when he had assured himself that his poniard was still in its place, he seized the guide's arm.

"What do you want with me?" the latter asked.

"Nothing."

"Why, then, do you take me by the arm?"

"It is an idea of mine."

"And if it did not please me to suffer it?"

"I should be grieved, but you would have to submit to it."

"Do you know, Monsieur Belle-Rose, that if I called, we are not so far from the carriage that I could not be heard."

"I even believe that you would not have to call very loud in order to be heard."

The guide's hand trembled in that of the sergeant.

"But I warn you that at the least cry and the least effort to release yourself, I shall plant this poniard in your breast," continued Belle-Rose.

The guide saw the pale lightning of the steel shine at two inches from his face. He shivered.

"Supposing I do not wish to advance," he rejoined.

"Then we should turn back; but as this new resolution would prove to me that I ought to remain in your company I would ask you to turn back with me."

"You are mad! Do you fear then to be assassinated?"

"Not at all. But my maxim is always to do things in company with some one. You live more gayly thus; you ought to die less sadly, too."

The guide fixed his brilliant gaze upon Belle-Rose's face, on which was painted that firm and calm resolution particularly characteristic of him.

"Go ahead!" said the guide; and they continued to advance toward the light.

This light shone at a window—the only one open—in a species of hut lost in the depth of the woods. The guide knocked at a door which opened at once. Belle-Rose and

he penetrated a corridor at the end of which their feet encountered a stair-way. The door closed, the light disappeared, and they mounted the steps. At the top of this stair-way, the guide lifted a curtain, and both found themselves at the entrance of a room wonderfully decorated. The silken folds of rich hangings covered the walls; a carpet deadened the sound of footsteps; the furniture was inlaid with copper and mother-of-pearl; upon a brocatel sofa, crowned by a canopy, a woman clothed in a velvet dress red as scarlet was half reclining; her naked arms were lost in floods of lace, and her hand, whiter than a jasmine flower, softly waved a fan with green feathers. A mask concealed her face. No look could penetrate either form or contour, and yet whosoever had seen this woman thus reclining would have divined that she was radiantly beautiful. At some steps from the sofa were two fauteuils; Belle-Rose and his guide sat down in them, on a sign from the lady with the black mask. A lamp shaded by an alabaster globe diffused its white light over the hangings of purple silk; its pale rays were broken at the corners of the polished furniture, upon the carvings of the candelabra, with their thousand crystal facets, and the arrangement of light augmented the magic appearance of this place which was embalmed by the perfumes emanating from invisible scent-boxes.

"You call yourself Belle-Rose?" said the lady to the falconer's son.

"Yes, madame."

"And you come on the part of Monsieur d'Assonville?"

"He must have informed you of the fact."

"Have you known him a long time?"

"My father was his father's servitor."

"His servitor! You belong, then, to his family?"

"I am a soldier, and Monsieur d'Assonville has at times done me the honor to call me his friend."

"Ah!" said the lady, with an accent of surprise mixed with disdain.

Then she continued:

"Do you know nothing of the causes which led Monsieur d'Assonville to send you to me?"

"Nothing."

"How can you assure me of it?"

"My word."

"Your word!" said she, shaking her fan.

She did not add a syllable, but it was impossible to mistake the expression of her voice.

"Those who believe in falsehood practice it," Belle-Rose boldly said.

The unknown trembled but did not reply, and addressed herself to Belle-Rose's guide, expressing herself in a foreign tongue.

"Eh! madame, I cannot!" replied the guide, in French.

"Who hinders you."

"The soldier, who has maintained his hold on me the whole length of the path and still maintains it."

"It is a whim which I pardon him, but which is going to finish this moment."

Belle-Rose made no reply, but his fingers did not for a moment cease to clasp the wrist of the guide.

"Well! did you hear me?" said the impatient lady.

"Perfectly; but why should I do what you desire?"

"Because I wish it."

"That is a pretext at most, and I ask for a reason."

"Insolent!" exclaimed the unknown lady, springing to her feet. "Do you know that if I called, there are arms near here disposed to force you to obey and to punish you afterward?"

"I believe it, madame; but at the first cry, at the first gesture, I shall stretch this guide dead at your feet."

The fair unknown drew back at the sight of the poniard suspended above the breast of the page.

"And when he is dead, the others will see that they are dealing with a resolute man who is not easy to overcome. Call now!" repeated the sergeant.

"Do not do it, madame; he would kill me as he says," exclaimed the guide.

"Ah! you are courageous, it appears," said the masked woman. "I thank Monsieur d'Assonville for having sent me such a valiant ambassador."

"And I thank him for having chosen me for a mission in which arms must intervene in the midst of a discourse. Monsieur d'Assonville did not deceive me."

"What! is it indeed he who caused you to take this poniard?" she exclaimed, in an indignant voice.

"Was he wrong, madame?"

The unknown lady trembled at this question coldly propounded, and Belle-Rose saw her neck purpled by a sudden blush. She again seated herself upon the sofa and appeared to gaze attentively at him.

"Let us cut short this debate," she softly said. "If I give you my word that nothing shall be done to you, will you release that page?"

"He is free, madame. You have doubted my word; I will not insult you by doubting yours."

Belle-Rose's hand opened, and the page stepped quickly to his mistress' side.

"He is a bold and handsome young fellow, truly!" exclaimed the lady. "Upon my soul, here is a young soldier whom the captain's epaulettes would become marvelously. Frank and firm as steel."

The voice of the unknown charmed Belle-Rose like the sonorous vibrations of a harp. He listened to it still after she had ceased speaking, and his heart had the mysterious revelation of the boundless love which this woman ought to inspire, and the irremediable misfortune which ought to result from her relinquishment. He had just understood the mute despair of Monsieur d'Assonville.

"Belle-Rose, wait," she resumed; "you will be free in a moment."

The masked lady and the page spoke in low tones for some minutes; then the latter, approaching a small ebony table upon which was some paper, presented a pen to his mistress, who wrote a letter, folded it, placed it in an envelope, impressed a ring which she wore upon her finger upon the burning wax and extended the dispatch to Belle-Rose.

"Here is my reply, remit it promptly to Monsieur d'Assonville, and forget everything—even the road which you have taken to come here. But if some day men fail you, strike boldly at the door in the Rue Cassette and give your name; a woman will recollect."

Belle-Rose bowed over the hand of the fair unknown and took the letter, touching, as he did so, the end of a perfumed glove with his lips.

"May God preserve you, handsome cavalier!" said she, and casting a last glance at Belle-Rose, she disappeared behind a curtain.

"Are you coming?" said the page, as Belle-Rose, dazzled by that glance and shivering at those words, remained immovable before the large folds of the purple damask.

Belle-Rose trembled, and full of agitation, followed the guide. They descended the steps, traversed the forest without seeing any shadow this time, and mounted within the carriage. The page lowered the blinds, and two hours after the carriage stopped at the entrance of the Rue de Vangirard. A lackey opened the portière, Belle-Rose descended, and the equipage left at a gallop. When Belle-Rose reached the corner of the Rue du Pot-de-Fer St. Sul-

pice, the honest Monsieur Mériset was in great trouble. The worthy proprietor had not gone to bed. His lamp, ordinarily extinguished about nine o'clock, was still burning two hours after midnight, and standing behind his half-closed blinds, he cast anxious looks into the shadows of the street.

"Ah! Monsieur Belle-Rose, what a burden you lift from me!" said he to the sergeant. "I feared you were dead."

"I am not so yet, but I may be at any time."

"Do not speak in that lugubrious fashion; at the present hour it is rather risky to use such language."

"Is it, then, to assure yourself that I am indeed alive that you have waited for me?"

"It is also for handing you this paper which a gentleman has left after having come twice. He has urgently insisted on its being given only to you, assuring me that it was very important."

While Monsieur Mériset was speaking, Belle-Rose opened the epistle and read these words by the light of the proprietor's candle:

"Monsieur de Villebrais is not dead, though he is not in a condition to rise soon, if he ever does; he has spoken, and the secret of your meeting has been confided to people who undoubtedly have given orders for your arrest. Your only hope is to fly, and the sooner the better. Quit Paris, and count upon me, whatever happens.

"CORNELIUS O'BRIEN."

Belle-Rose was expecting this news. He burned the note without showing any agitation, and drawing from his pocket a well-plenished purse, he asked Monsieur Meriset if he did not know some honest person whom he could charge with a delicate commission.

"I have my nephew, Christopher Mériset, a clever fellow and as mute as a confessional."

"You answer for him."

"He is my heir."

"Then I confide to him this letter to carry and also another which I am going to write to a captain of light-horse garrisoned at Arras."

"He will carry them.

"Without delay?"

"In an hour."

Belle-Rose wrote to Monsieur d'Assonville to inform him of what he had seen and what events prevented his carrying in person the reply of the unknown lady. Immediately after the arrival of Nephew Christopher, he handed him

the two letters, with a recommendation to diligence; then leaving Monsieur Mériset a note for his sister Claudine, he imparted to him the necessity of his going away.

"Ah! my God! will you not return?" said the landlord.

"I will return, and I pray you to keep my room for me along with these ten louis, which will be yours if I am not back in fifteen days. I will only ask you to say nothing, either of what you have seen or of my departure, if perchance some curious person question you."

"I understand," said Monsieur Mériset, who scented under this mystery an affair of state, "I understand and will be silent."

Belle-Rose undressed, put on some clothes belonging to Nephew Christopher, armed himself with a stick, and quitted the Rue du Pot-de-Fer St. Sulpice.

"It is to Monsieur de Naucrais I owe my sergeant's halberd," he said to himself; "it is to him I shall return it."

CHAPTER XI.

THE LIGHTING OF A PASSION.

At daybreak Belle-Rose found himself already three or four leagues beyond St. Denis, upon the route to Flanders. The country smiled in the white light of the morning, and joyous girls passed singing along the road. Around Belle-Rose all was light and gayety; within all was gloom and sadness. He had lost his sweetheart, he had just lost his liberty, he was going, undoubtedly, to lose his life. His heart swelled under this wave of bitter thoughts. He had struggled, he was conquered. But the voice of his conscience did not reproach him. About noon he stopped in a species of cabaret; he had taken nothing since the evening before. The landlady, a petulant young woman, cooked an omelette in a turn of the hand.

"You are just in time, my boy," she said to him. "A quarter of an hour later, and you would have run the risk of no longer finding either egg-shells or a crust of bread. Where the police pass nothing remains."

"Ah!" said Belle-Rose, "you are expecting the police of the king?"

"Half a dozen rascals who are as thirsty as sand and hungry as dogs. But here they are advancing from the end of the plain. Do you see them, with their muskets upon their shoulders?"

"Very well! they are hunting some malefactor, no doubt?"

"Ah, yes! the country might be pillaged, and they would pay no attention to it. They are searching for a poor soldier."

"A soldier?"

"Some deserter, so a brigadier has told me. It is a question of a young man almost of your build, blonde like you, lithe and vigorous as you seem to be."

The landlady ceased speaking to gaze at Belle-Rose. A flash of suspicion lit up her eyes. Belle-Rose started, threw some money on the table, and made toward the door. The butt-end of a musket struck the pebbles. The landlady rushed to the fugitive.

"Chut!" she rapidly whispered to him, "I have understood nothing, guessed nothing, but do not advance. A foot in the road, and you are a dead man. Enter that cabinet; I am going to occupy them with my best wine. If they do not see you, they will leave in an hour, and you will be saved. If they see you, *dame!* there is the window."

Belle-Rose threw himself into the neighboring hall just as the door of the cabaret opened.

"The sky is an oven and the road is a gridiron!" said the soldier, on entering.

"So that you have an outrageous thirst," replied the landlady. "Take, then, and drink," she added, placing a pitcher of wine upon the table.

Those who came by way of the plain entered at the same moment. The majority of them threw their hats and muskets upon the benches and sat down around the table. The landlady passed and repassed through the cabinet, which had an outlet into the kitchen.

"They are drinking," she said, quite low, to Belle-Rose.

"All of them?"

"All except one."

Belle Rose opened the window.

At the landlady's third trip, a soldier followed her.

"Leave me alone and finish your dinner," said she.

"No, your arms are too beautiful."

"If they are beautiful, they are strong; so take care of your cheeks."

"Eh! eh!" said the soldier, on perceiving Belle-Rose, "we are not alone! The company frightens love. Eh, friend, turn round slightly, so we can see you."

Belle-Rose trembled at the sound of this voice, which

was not unknown to him. He placed one hand upon the window, turned round, and recognized Bouletord, who had passed from the artillery to the police, where he had valiantly won the lace of a brigadier.

"Belle-Rose!" he exclaimed. "Eh! eh! comrade, we have an old account to settle. You are my prisoner."

"Not yet," said Belle-Rose, placing his foot upon the window.

Bouletord rushed toward him, but a furious blow of the fist stretched him out on the floor, and in a bound Belle-Rose crossed the window. At the brigadier's cries, the police ran up, but by a singular inadvertence, in wishing to aid Bouletord, the landlady had pushed back the sash covered with red curtains, so that the view of the country and the fugitive was obstructed.

"What is the matter?" the soldiers asked.

Bouletord, without replying, seized a musket, opened the window, and fired. The ball knocked off the bark of a willow ten steps from Belle-Rose.

"Poor fellow!" said the landlady, "how he runs!"

"Make haste!" Bouletord cried to his men. "It is our deserter. If he escapes he robs us of ten louis."

The police took up the pursuit of the fugitive, but they were embarrassed by their shoulder-straps, and Belle-Rose gained ground. From the window at which she was leaning, the landlady assisted at this improvised chase. Instead of a stag, it was a man who was being run down.

"How he goes!" she said, in a low tone, all the while following the episodes of this race, and without suspecting that she was speaking aloud. "See him traversing the clover of Père Benoit. Good! he leaps the ditch. He has the legs of a squirrel, that boy! Ah! there is a soldier stretched out; he has struck his foot against a stump, the awkward fellow! and another; this one has got entangled in the scabbard of his saber. The deserter is already far away; he will certainly escape them. Ah! my God! the brigadier stops a marsh-gardener; he takes his horse, gets astride of it, pricks it with the point of his sword, and leaves at a gallop. The brigadier remembers that blow of the fist! Another soldier imitates him, then still another. Three soldiers on horseback against one man on foot! He is lost! Ah! he has heard them; see him entering the plowed land—he is far from being a fool! The horses are heavy; they will sink in. Well! they are already going less quickly. And he? the poor fellow flies like a partridge; he leaps the streams. Hold! where does he wish to go?

Ah! he has thought of the woods, and he is quite right! He approaches, he reaches them, he enters—has disappeared!"

When Belle-Rose had penetrated the woods, he ran for some minutes still—ran till he no longer heard the noise of the horses galloping upon the edge. He then took to one side, made a hundred steps, and hid himself in a thicket. Bouletord and his two acolytes arrived; at this place the paths forked. The brigadier took to the right, the soldiers took to the left, and three minutes after the noise of their course was lost in the distance. Belle-Rose, secure in that direction, and wishing to avoid the pursuit of the police on foot, who would not fail to search the woods, again ran straight before him through the underbrush. He ran against a wall and crossed it. At the end of a quarter of an hour he found himself upon the border of an avenue which was divided by a stream, across which a bridge had been thrown. A gate closed it on one side, a large chateau rose up at the other end. Belle-Rose looked forth; he saw nothing, heard nothing. Decidedly the police had lost their way. He entered the avenue and walked toward the chateau. He had scarcely made twenty steps, when he perceived some distance away a lady on horseback and behind her a servant in livery. The lady appeared to be reading a letter which the lackey no doubt had just handed her. From the foam which whitened his bit and his neck, one might believe that the valet's horse had completed a long journey, while that of the lady, frisky and mettlesome, seemed impatient to be going. The lady, who appeared young and beautiful, had scarcely finished her reading when, crumpling the letter in her hand, she applied a vigorous stroke of the whip to her horse; the horse, surprised, gave a bound and left like an arrow. His mistress uttered a cry, the valet threw himself forward, but he could not seize the bridle of the horse, who fled down the avenue. He was going to thread the bridge thrown across the stream, when a branch, driven by the wind, got entangled in his legs. The horse, frightened, leaped upon the bank of the river, which was very steep at this place. His hind feet were on the edge, and the least *faux pas* might precipitate him into the deep water which laved the arches of the bridge. Belle-Rose saw the peril at a glance. He leaped upon the bank, seized the horse by the bit, and jerked him to one side. The lady, paler than a corpse, sprang from the saddle, and Belle-Rose and the smoking courser rolled upon the grass. Belle-

Rose heard only one cry, and fainted. When he came to himself, he was extended upon a sofa in a large and magnificently furnished room. His first act was to carry his hand to his forehead; a keen pain answered the contact of his fingers.

"Yes, yes, you are wounded! It would have only taken half an inch more for the horse's hoofs to strike your temple. Adonis has been adroit in his awkwardness."

Belle-Rose looked to see who was speaking, and recognized the lady whom he had just drawn from so great a peril. He wished to raise himself to thank her for the care which she had taken of him.

"Keep still," said she, "you are not in condition to move with the wound in your head and the bleeding which your arm has undergone."

Belle-Rose only then perceived that his left arm was surrounded with bandages. He smiled and again fixed his eyes upon the lady who was seated before him in a large fauteuil. Her riding habit, torn in three or four places, was stained with blood; she, too, carried her arm in a sling, and her streaming hair fell in long, brown tresses around her face, where shone wondrously beautiful eyes. In the midst of the confused sensations agitating his soul, it seemed to the young officer that it was not the first time the sound of that voice had struck his ear; but he could not recall either in what place or under what circumstances he had heard it. As to the lady's face, it was altogether unknown to him. She answered Belle-Rose's smile by another smile; but there was something bitter and disdainful in the movement of her lips which robbed them of their grace.

"I understand," said she; "you have felt nothing, neither the fall, nor the kick, nor the removal to the chateau upon a litter, nor the bleeding, nor the bandaging. A pretty woman would not have fainted better."

Belle-Rose blushed slightly.

"But," continued the lady, "you fell from the clouds, then, when you so brusquely seized hold of Adonis?"

Belle-Rose had forgotten everything. The lady's question made him recollect. He saw again, at the same time, his duel, his departure, his flight, and was silent, measuring in thought the solitude and misfortune into which his life had just been plunged.

"Oh! I do not ask you for your secret," continued his interlocutrix. "You have saved my life—the least that I can do for you is to let you preserve silence. But, upon

my soul, the man who has come near causing my death, after having killed Monsieur de Villebrais, has now a double account to settle with me."

Belle-Rose gazed at the lady in astonishment. She was frowning, her lips were contracted, and from her cheeks a feverish blush had just chased the pallor.

"Monsieur de Villebrais!" exclaimed Belle-Rose, raising himself slightly.

"Do you know him?" said the unknown.

"An officer in the artillery?" added the wounded man.

"Precisely. An officer in the artillery whom I was expecting at the chateau; his murderer has fled; but I know well how to reach him wherever he conceals himself."

"It is then his life you wish, madame?"

"Certainly! after the crime, the punishment."

"Take it, then!" exclaimed Belle-Rose, "for I am he whom you seek."

"You! but you have struck him from behind!"

"I struck Monsieur de Villebrais in front, sword clashing sword, and if I have struck him, 'tis because he had insulted a woman."

"Some grisette!"

"My sister, madame."

"Eh! what matters it to me? What difference makes it though it was your sister?"

"Madame!" exclaimed Belle-Rose, "I have delivered my life to you, but I have not delivered to you the honor of my family. Have me killed, if you like, but do not insult me."

Belle-Rose was standing; an extraordinary emotion animated his countenance, and over his pale forehead filtered some drops of blood; the brilliancy of his eyes, the authority of his gesture, the bold expression of his voice, awed the unknown lady. She who seemed accustomed to command, hesitated, her eyes fixed upon that young face full of strength and resolution. She felt moved even to the depth of her heart, and was astonished to no longer find movement or speech to answer the daring youth who dominated her.

Seeing her silent, Belle-Rose forgot his indignation; a sweet smile passed over his colorless lips, and bowing with a grace full of simplicity, he said:

"Pardon, madame, I was defending my sister against your anger, but I abandon the brother to your vengeance."

The eyes of the unknown lady softened; she quivered all over, and murmured, in a voice inexpressibly sweet:

"Young, brave, and handsome—all at the same time!" Then she continued, smilingly:

"You are too much in the right for Monsieur de Villebrais not to be a little in the wrong."

It would be difficult to account for the profound joy which expanded in the heart of Belle-Rose. It certainly was not born of the hope of escaping an inevitable condemnation; he had determined to go and seek it himself. Was it not rather occasioned by the interest which the fair unknown seemed to take in him? Belle-Rose alone would have been able to explain the nature of his sensations, and they were still too confused for him to think of analyzing them.

"Monsieur de Villebrais is nevertheless a good swordsman?" said the lady, following with the eyes upon the face of Belle-Rose the reflection of his fugitive thoughts. "You are then very redoubtable, sword in hand?"

"I had right on my side, madame."

"If you defend a sister so valiantly, what, then, would you do for a mistress?"

"I would do my best."

"Then she whom you love will be well guarded."

At these words, which recalled Suzanne to him, Belle-Rose blushed. The lady took notice of it.

"Ah! you love!" said she, casting a rapid glance at the wounded man.

At this moment a waiting woman entered the apartment. On seeing Belle-Rose she trembled; but the unknown lady, making the gesture of throwing back the tresses of her hair, placed her finger upon her lips.

"The carriage which madame asked for is ready," said the waiting woman.

The duchess was about to depart. Belle-Rose wished to salute her, but the effort which he had just made in rising had exhausted his strength; he tottered and leaned upon the back of a fauteuil to keep from falling.

"Monsieur de Villebrais is dying," said the waiting woman to her mistress, speaking low.

The duchess had advanced toward the door; on turning back to throw a last look at Belle-Rose, she saw the livid pallor extending over his forehead, which was moistened by a tiny stream of blood. With a haughty gesture, she dismissed the waiting woman and rushed to him.

"I remain," said the duchess.

CHAPTER XII.

THE DREAMS OF A SUMMER DAY.

For some days Belle-Rose remained concealed, a prey to a burning fever; the strength of his constitution and the vigor of his will had at first succeeded in making the evil appear less than what it was; but he was finally forced to give way to the violence of the reaction which took place in him. His body and mind were no longer able to offer any resistance. Very often, while the delirium made numberless dreams pass through his imagination, he thought he saw, leaning over his bed, a woman's face half vailed by long ringlets of hair. Then he called Suzanne in a voice broken by sobs, and his parched lips were glued to white hands which were abandoned to his kisses. But—strange thing!—in those hours when the love of Belle-Rose was inflamed by all the fires of fever, the face of the unknown was turned aside, and all her body trembled like a branch shaken by the wind. A day came on which the patient was able to cast a more tranquil look around him. The silence was profound. In the transparent shadows of a room where the light was intercepted by silken hangings, a woman, surrounded by the long folds of a white dress, was seated in a fauteuil. A scarcely finished dream floated still before the eyes of Belle-Rose; he extended his arms to the deceitful image of his sweetheart, and his mouth murmured softly the name of Suzanne.

"I am not Suzanne," said the stranger.

Belle-Rose propped himself up on his elbow and looked at her. The vail in which fever had imprisoned his soul disappeared like those vapors of the morning which are extinguished by the first beams of the sun. Belle-Rose recognized the duchess. A smile soft and sad illuminated her countenance.

"It was you?" said he.

"It is a friend whom you did not call and who watched over you," replied the duchess. "But do not question me yet. I have orders to impose silence on you. Obey."

The duchess placed a finger upon her lips and softly forced the soldier to lie down again. But she herself was the first to forget the instructions which she had charged herself with seeing executed.

"Then you love this Suzanne?" said she, with a slight trembling of the voice.

A sudden blush covered Belle-Rose's cheeks.

"Have I named her?" he exclaimed. "Oh, madame, pardon my delirium."

"Eh! monsieur, I do not ask you for excuses, but an avowal."

With anger, the sonorousness of her voice had returned. Lightning flashed in the duchess' eyes, and her nostrils quivered. Belle-Rose, half raised upon his elbow, gazed at her for a minute; calm and serene before this ill-restrained anger, he said, with the simplicity of a Christian confessing his faith:

"Yes, madame, I love her."

The eyes of the duchess were lowered under the glance of Belle-Rose; she let her head fall upon her breast, and if the doubtful light of the room had permitted the wounded young man to gaze upon that bowed face, he would have seen a tear glide over her cheek like a drop of dew over polished marble.

"Is she your betrothed?" said she, in a voice so weak that it passed like a murmur between the pale and trembling lips.

"No," said Belle-Rose, sadly, "she is a friend whom I have lost."

The duchess' glance was illuminated by a brilliant ray; then, with her forehead supported on her hand, she kept silent. The Duchesse de Châteaufort was then in all the splendor of her beauty. Tall, slender, with an admirably formed waist, her whole person offered a happy mixture of grace and dignity; she possessed naturally that easy walk, that noble carriage, and that grand air for which the ladies of the court of Louis XIV. were renowned through all Europe. The warmth of the Spanish blood, which she derived from her mother, was betrayed in the humid sparkle of her limpid and radiant eyes, in the mute appeal of her purple lips, in the undulating movements of her supple body, in the caresses of her voice filled with pure and velvety sounds. Madame de Châteaufort transformed herself like a fairy, and under the great lady often shone the enchantress. She knew how to give her mouth, of a proud and disdainful contour, the suave outline of an ingenuous smile; the pale transparence of her cheeks, of her neck, of her shoulders, was at times illuminated by rosy tints, as reddens the snow under a kiss from the sun. This divine statue grew animated under the lightning of

passion; and like the antique goddess, she appeared to the charmed eyes resplendent with life, youth, and love. Madame de Châteaufort passed for one of the most influential women belonging to the court of the young king; her husband, governor of one of the provinces in the south of France, complacently left her at Paris, where he could hope everything from his wife's credit. In return for this influence, Monsieur de Châteaufort accorded to the duchess, his wife, a liberty which she made full use of. There was between them a sort of tacit compromise whose clauses were loyally executed. To him titles, honor, dignities; to her luxury, pleasures, independence. At the epoch of which we speak, such associations as these, consecrated by the sacrament of marriage, were tolerated, perhaps even authorized in morals, and no one thought of speaking ill of their consequences. Those who made Madame de Châteaufort's conduct the subject of their conversations did not think of blaming her; young people cultivated her acquaintance because they were flattered to know her, others on account of their ambition At the time Madame de Châteaufort met Belle-Rose, the rumor of her amour with Monsieur de Villebrais began to spread at court. The refined ones were astonished and sought the cause of it; the old lords, who had made war under Madame de Chevreuse and Madame de Longueville, did not worry themselves about a small thing like that.

"It is, because it is," said they. "Does any one know why the wind blows?"

But that which no one doubted was that the reign of Monsieur de Villebrais had seen its last hour; from its dawn to its twilight, this amour had only been a flash. The noble pride, the calm and reflective audacity of Belle-Rose, had surprised Madame de Châteaufort; his youth, his good looks, had touched her. Under the dress of a soldier, she had just recognized the language and sentiments of a gentleman; never had so much isolation and resolution appeared under the grave and charming figure of a young man. Belle-Rose had revealed himself to Madame de Châteaufort in the midst of circumstances which were attached to an epoch of her life which she could never forget; he had shown himself filled, at the same time, with hardihood and noble confidence; he had saved her life and had offered her his own in exchange; around his youth shone the aureole of a mysterious love. Is it surprising that curiosity, astonishment, interest, a thousand confused and inexplicable sensations, had de-

tained Madame de Châteaufort near the bleeding form of Belle-Rose? When she had remained, she forgot Monsieur de Villebrais, and when she had forgotten the officer, she loved the soldier. But this new love did not triumph over her pride without a struggle. Twenty times a rebel against the tender and tumultuous sentiments which this passion born of accident raised in her heart, she wished to break the chain which kept her at the bedside of the patient, but an hour's absence soon brought her back more inflamed and more submissive than ever. She was no longer the imperious woman with whom words were commands, who chose in the crowd of courtiers, and who knew how to remain free and mistress of herself even in her going astray. She loved, and the disdain of her soul was lost in the breath of a tenderness as infinite as unexpected. Leaning over the bed to which fever bound Belle-Rose, she listened to his delirium, her heart bounding at each word, and let flow, without seeing them, the tears to which she was no longer accustomed. When the convalescence came, Madame de Châteaufort enlivened its first days by her assiduous presence and the thousand enchantments of her mind; and the first time Belle-Rose passed the threshold of his room, she made him lean on her arm. Belle-Rose still loved Madame d'Albergotti, but we must acknowledge also that he willingly leaned on the arm of Madame de Châteaufort. True that, for nothing in the world would he have wished to betray her to whom all his soul had been given; but at the least rustling of a satin dress gliding over the sand of the paths, all the secret dreams, all the confused desires of his youth fled to Madame de Châteaufort. His love for Madame d'Albergotti was pure and calm like a lake shaded by willows; he saw the bottom at the first glance, and his heart drew from it a tender melancholy which left to his dreams their certainty and their limpidity; but at the sight of Genevieve de Châteaufort, all his soul was troubled, a strange tumult took place in his mind, he felt mount to his lips a thousand burning words, looked wildly at her, and fled, no longer knowing whether love was that profound and sincere worship which he vowed to the name of Suzanne, or the delirium which was lit by the presence of Genevieve. Nevertheless he remained, and like those travelers slumbering under the odoriferous foliage of the Antilles which conceals poison in its perfumes, he no longer had the strength to shake off the intoxicating sleep produced by a nascent passion.

Belle-Rose had not the liberty of leaving the park, but

in its extent, sprinkled with gardens and patches of wood, he wandered at hazard; only he did not wander alone. In the eyes of the servants at the chateau, he passed for a gentleman, as he wore the dress and sword of one, and the lackeys invariably called him Monsieur de Verval. This name Madame de Châteaufort had given him, the better to conceal his identity.

"That is one way to save Belle-Rose," she had said.

Belle-Rose understood; the lackeys could talk at their ease of Monsieur de Verval. Never, under the name of that gentleman, would Bouletord and the police scent the sergeant of artillery. Madame de Châteaufort absented herself a short while about this time, and Belle-Rose's conscience began to worry him over that feverish idleness which attached him to a woman when the care of his happiness called him to Laon. Therefore he determined to break these new ties which interfered with his liberty. Some words written in haste informed Claudine and Cornelius of the events which had followed his departure from Paris and of the decision which he had just come to. He confided his letters to a lackey, with a request to carry them in all haste to the residence of Madame d'Albergotti. Three or four louis assured him of the valet's diligence, and he awaited the return of Madame de Châteaufort in order to declare to her his intention of leaving immediately. The intervening time was passed by him in a very restless manner. Belle-Rose knew that he did not have any too much courage for sustaining the sight of Genevieve, and he asked himself if it would not be better to go away without speaking to her. The fear of offending her stopped him; strange thought at the moment when he had decided to flee her presence for good and all! Madame de Châteaufort returned very late on this day; midnight had just struck when the park gate opened, and before Belle-Rose could speak to her, she had passed into her apartments. The sergeant put off then his declaration and his departure till the next day. Could any one have descended to the bottom of his heart, perhaps it would have been discovered that he was not too much afflicted by this disappointment. Madame de Châteaufort and Belle-Rose occupied a detached building separated from the principal one, which the workmen were engaged in repairing; Belle-Rose's apartment was on the ground floor, that of the duchess on the first story. Both opened upon the park. The night was superb; numberless stars, scattered like gold-dust over the velvet of the sky, projected into space

a trembling light, while the somber clumps of the trees in the park vailed the uncertain horizon. Belle-Rose opened the window and bared his forehead to the fresh breezes of the night; the agitation of his thoughts did not permit him to taste repose, and instead of delivering his mind to the dreams of sleep, he abandoned it to the dreams of love. He had been dreaming for an hour or two, when he saw the black curtain of trees illuminated under the red reflections of a sudden light. Flames succeeded flames, and their splendor made purple the sky where paled the stars. Belle-Rose, astonished, crossed his window-sill and turned to the story where Madame de Chateaufort slept. A thousand flames were escaping through the balconies where whirled streams of sparks. At the same moment cries of fright came from all sides, and the women servants of the duchess, surprised by the fire in the midst of their sleep, rushed from room to room, half-naked; full of terror they ran at hazard, fleeing the flames which crawled along the facades, devoured the hangings, expanded like flaming plumes at the end of the chimneys, and rolled like waves under the propulsion of the wind. The guards and lackeys, awakened by the threatening noises of the fire, armed themselves with ladders and buckets; all the domestics in the chateau were on foot in a moment and ran to the detached building on which the fire was preying. Belle-Rose was the first to recognize the imminence and extent of the peril; the fire, communicated, no doubt, to some curtain by a neglected candle, ought to make rapid progress in an apartment where the carpets, the hangings, the furniture heaped together lent a thousand aids to its impetuosity. A cry of horror escaped his lips, he rushed to the stair-way, and in a second succeeded in gaining the story occupied by Madame de Châteaufort. Fright lent him treble strength; the first door he came across was shattered at the first shock, and he threw himself into the hall filled with flames. The maids passed by his side like phantoms. Belle-Rose kept on advancing, a last door fell under the effort of his powerful hands, a whirlwind of smoke and sparks enveloped him; but he had already seized in his arms the body of a woman who was calling him. Then, more rapid than an arrow, inspired by the precious burden reposing on his breast, bounding over the blackened floor, between calcined walls, down the burning stair-way, he crossed the penon with the startling rapidity of a shadow, and fleeing the fire whose refulgence pursued him, he deposited Gen-

evieve in a pavilion built upon the edge of the park. Madame de Châteaufort, half suffocated, had recognized Belle-Rose just as the demolished door gave him passage. The soldier's name died upon her lips, she wrapped her arms around Belle-Rose's neck and closed her eyes, intoxicated with love and fright. This fantastic trip in the midst of the flames and the sinister noises of the fire, while she was supported upon Belle-Rose's heart, fascinated her. When Belle-Rose had laid her upon the sofa, he knelt down near her, and taking both her hands in his, he covered them with tears and kisses.

"Living! oh, my God, living!" he exclaimed.

Madame de Châteaufort opened her eyes; her dream was over. Belle-Rose parted Madame de Châteaufort's floating hair, took her head between his hands, gazing at her with eyes aflame under tears, and, pale with love, kissed her on the forehead. Madame de Châteaufort shivered from head to feet; her eyes closed, and her lips returned Belle-Rose's kiss. The soldier started to his feet, tottering like a wounded man.

"You are saved," said he; "let me go away."

Genevieve started up with a bound.

"Go! you speak of going?" she exclaimed.

"Eh! madame, let it be to-day or to-morrow, is it not necessary for me to leave you?"

The light of the fire half dissipated the obscurity of the pavilion; Madame de Châteaufort, beautiful with terror, drew round her form the floating folds of her dress; over her naked shoulders streamed the brown tresses of her long hair, fever and fright were painted in her gaze, anguish and prayer upon her face. Never had she appeared so charming to the eyes of Belle-Rose; the doubtful light which surrounded her heightened the divine expression of her beauty. Vainly repressed, the passion of the soldier burst forth in a cry.

"You see that I love you! let me leave!" said he.

Genevieve fell back upon the sofa, overwhelmed with joy.

"Had you not guessed it, madame?" said Belle-Rose; "I love you with the passion of a madman and the fright of a child. But what am I to you? A poor soldier picked up on the highway, a fugitive, a deserter to whom your pity has offered an exile. And this soldier loves you—you who are beautiful, rich, powerful, honored; you are a duchess of the king's court. I have forgotten everything, madame, what I am and what you are, and I dare tell you of it! In

order to make me quits with you, God has permitted me to save you once again. Now let me leave!"

Madame de Châteaufort arose frightened and all in tears; her eyes shone like two diamonds.

"Leave!" she exclaimed; "but I love you!"

CHAPTER XIII.

A SERPENT IN THE SHADOW.

Belle-Rose did not leave; the first link in the strong and burning chain of pleasure was riveted to his heart. He trod a flowery path strewn with those enchantments which are born under the footsteps of beauty, youth, and love. In the meantime a letter reached him from Cornelius O'Brien; it informed him that Monsieur de Villebrais, who, contrary to expectation, had recovered from his wounds, was pressing the pursuit of which Belle-Rose was the object; that Monsieur d'Assonville, after being shot in an engagement with some raiders on the frontier, had just quitted his cantonment; it was believed that he had left for Paris with the intention of consulting some surgeons more skillful than those of his squadron. As to Claudine, she was in the country with her mistress, whom Monsieur d'Albergotti had taken to the Duchess de Longueville's, with whom he had been on friendly terms in the time of the Fronde. Cornelius O'Brien promised his friend to find out what steps Monsieur de Villebrais would take, and to inform him of those particular ones which might be of interest to him. Belle-Rose may have sighed after he read the letter, but perceiving Madame de Châteaufort advancing to him, he no longer thought of it. Belle-Rose and Genevieve often wandered over the park on each other's arms, sat down at the most solitary places, followed the shadiest paths, and let the day fade and the night begin without counting the hours. But during the last two or three days they found that they were not alone, no matter where they were. A man kept them under espionage in their rambles, and after night came, followed in their footsteps. Concealed in the thickets of the park, he watched for their approach and seemed to be waiting, patient and silent as a tiger, for a propitious hour to carry out a mysterious design. At times, as the two lovers plunged into the obscurest part of the park, a noise

of twigs crushed under an invisible foot broke the silence. Belle-Rose, accustomed through his watches around the bivouac to take note of the most confused sounds, turned his head

"It is a squirrel frightened by the noise of a kiss," said Madame de Châteaufort.

Farther on, the soldier thought he saw, between the clumps of trees, a rapid shadow fleeing; but before he could distinguish its outline, the apparition had vanished.

"You see phantoms and do not see my smile," said his mistress.

One evening they came to a part of the park where the wall formed an angle. At the point of the angle, under some clusters of honeysuckle and clematis, a door opened upon the country. The brown tones of stone and wood were confounded under a trembling curtain of foliage. The grass seemed trampled around the door; two or three broken branches hung along the walls.

"Do the guards make use of this door?" asked Belle-Rose.

"No, it is almost unknown to the employees of the chateau."

"Some one has passed through it nevertheless."

"No one has the key to this door," replied Madame de Châteaufort.

"Look," repeated Belle-Rose, indicating with his finger a tuft of bruised mallow.

"Yesterday we passed along the wall; your hands were in mine; do you know where our feet were placed?"

Nevertheless Belle-Rose was not the plaything of an illusion. While Madame de Châteaufort was dissipating his momentarily awakened fears, Monsieur de Villebrais was following them from copse to copse. Dressed in common clothes, he had taken lodging, under a borrowed name, in a disreputable inn in the neighborhood, and when night came he introduced himself into Madame de Châteaufort's park, where the desire for vengeance called him. Astonished at the silence of Madame de Châteaufort, who had not answered his letters, Monsieur de Villebrais, as soon as he was able to walk, had asked for an interview. But when Madame de Châteaufort forgot, she did not half forget. She sent back then to Monsieur de Villebrais the letters which he had addressed to her, at the same time asking him to return hers, and to renounce all hope of ever seeing her again. The lieutenant of artillery knew the influence of the duchess, he obeyed so as to avoid making an

implacable enemy; but before sending back the key which she herself had given him, he had one forged exactly similar to it, promising himself to make use of it when the occasion called for it. This occasion soon presented itself. The seclusion in which Madame de Châteaufort had been living for two or three months began to be remarked at court. Monsieur de Villebrais ascribed this seclusion to the inconstancy of his mistress, and came to the conclusion that a new love dominated her. Wishing to know his happy rival, he disguised himself, left for the residence of Madame de Châteaufort, penetrated the park, and saw the duchess pass on Belle-Rose's arm. At sight of the soldier, Monsieur de Villebrais with difficulty restrained a cry of rage; the man who had insulted him, and who had conquered him sword in hand, had now stolen his mistress! It was too much by half for him to endure. For one moment Monsieur de Villebrais thought of rushing forward, and, arming himself with the military authority, reclaim the deserter; but he knew that the duchess was a woman who would never pardon such an offense, and the fear of being cut short in his career by her resentment stopped him. This constraint only served to render more keen his desire for vengeance. Not being able to struggle openly, he determined to wait and to confide to his own arm the task of making Belle-Rose pay at a single stroke for all the wounds which he had received from him. To better enchain Belle-Rose, Madame de Châteaufort multiplied the pleasures permitted him by a sojourn in the country. The chase entered largely into these pleasures. One morning, just as she was preparing to mount on horseback to hunt the stag, her waiting woman ran frightened up the steps of the chateau. She held a letter in her hand.

"I will read it this evening," said the duchess.

The waiting woman stopped her as she was setting foot in the stirrups, and spoke to her in a low tone.

"What does it matter?" said her mistress, impatiently.

And she leaped into the saddle. A moment after, the fanfares sounded and the chase was lost under the foliage.

"Yes," murmured the waiting woman, "he is young, handsome, and charming; but the captain is at Paris, so let him beware!"

The next day, while the duchess' women were preparing her clothing, the absent hand of Genevieve picked up on her toilet the disdained letter and opened it. At the first words, she grew pale; at the last line she uttered a faint cry and trembled with agitation.

"A carriage and horses!" she exclaimed.

Her astonished waiting women did not move.

"Do you hear me?" she repeated. "Horses! this very moment!"

One woman, terrified by Madame de Châteaufort's look, ran hastily out.

"Where is Camille? Let her come," she continued, twisting her long, scattered hair.

Camille entered. At the first glance she understood that her mistress had just received some terrible news; the crumpled letter was in her hand.

"When did you receive this letter?" exclaimed Madame de Châteaufort.

"Yesterday, madame," she replied; "yesterday morning."

"And it is only to-day I get it!"

"I presented it to you twice, and twice you repulsed me."

"Could you not constrain me to open it?"

"Eh! madame he was present!" exclaimed Camille, indicating with a gesture of inexpressible eloquence Belle-Rose passing through the garden.

"You did not know," resumed Madame de Châteaufort, in a choking voice and with her hand upon Camille's arm, "you did not know that this letter was from him; it is dated yesterday; yesterday he expected me, and he has sworn by the name of his mother that if he did not see me, he would even come here!"

"The carriage is ready," a female attendant timidly said, half opening the door.

Madame de Châteaufort clapped her hands like a child, and hastily seizing a mask and her mantle, she drew Camille toward the door.

"Come," said she, "*he* is still in Paris, no doubt; nothing is lost."

Belle-Rose, warned by a lackey of Madame de Châteaufort's departure, took a gun and plunged into the park. Delivered to his meditations alone, he observed more surely the indications which had struck him in his preceding walks with Madame de Châteaufort. A spy was undoubtedly prowling about the park The thought came to him that it might be Bouletord, who, infuriated by his discomfiture, was seeking a means to avenge himself. Belle-Rose resolved to immediately get rid of this importunate personage. He went to the chateau, slipped into his pockets a poniard and pistols, took a sword, waited for

night to come, and gained the park, thoroughly decided to make the visitor pay dear for his fatiguing surveillance.

"He is seeking a deserter," he said to himself; "he will find lead."

Soon the shadows invaded the park; the noises died, the lights of the evening were extinguished one by one in the woods filled with those mysterious murmurs which mount from earth to sky on starry nights. His steps led him to the angle in the park where the secret door gave an outlet to the country beyond. It was half open. Quite sure this time, Belle-Rose thought for a moment of breaking the blade of his poniard in the lock. His ear had warned him that already his promenade through the park had been spied. But he reflected that his spy, concealed, no doubt, in some thicket close about, understanding by this action that he was discovered, would escalade the wall and not show himself. Such was not the object of Belle-Rose. He continued his way, passing before the door as if he had not seen it. At the end of a hundred steps he stopped behind a large oak; the moon had just disappeared behind a cloud. He listened. After three or four minutes of waiting, he heard the door turn upon its rusty hinges. The shadows were thick—he saw nothing; a noise of footsteps broke the silence for a moment and soon died out. The soldier left his post of observation and followed the spy, taking care to keep upon the edge of the paths where the thick grass stifled the noise of his progress. The road which the unknown followed ended at a glade from which several avenues radiated; one of these avenues led to the chateau. Belle-Rose and Genevieve had frequently traversed it, and it was the route which they were accustomed to take when they returned at evening. Belle-Rose came to the conclusion that the spy, fully informed as to his habits, was going to wait for him at the corner of the avenue and there throw himself upon him. Thoroughly resolved to spare him the tedium of a long waiting, he was going to hasten his walk, when a cry came from the middle of the glade, and, at the same moment, the clashing of two swords was heard. Belle-Rose rushed forward, pistol in hand, but he had not made fifty steps when the noise suddenly ceased; the moon, emerging from the clouds which vailed it, inundated the forest with light, and in this light Belle-Rose saw pass a fleeing man, who had a naked sword in his hand. He bounded like a stag in pursuit of him. The murderer glided like a shadow between the trees and seemed to have wings. Just as he crossed

the edge of the wood, Belle-Rose fired his pistol at him, but the ball was lost in the trunk of a birch, and the fugitive disappeared through the little door in the park wall. At the moment Belle-Rose arrived before this door, the gallop of a horse made him understand that the murderer was now beyond his reach. The murderer had fled, but his victim was undoubtedly stretched upon the ground in the glade; who was that unfortunate whose life cut short by an assassination had saved his own? Belle-Rose hastened to the glade. A naked sword shone in the grass. Belle-Rose knelt down near the body. The blood came from two gaping wounds, one in the throat, the other full in the breast. At sight of that motionless body, whose mournful glance was turned toward heaven, Belle-Rose shivered from head to foot; he leaned over, and raising the victim in his arms, he exposed his head to the moon's pale rays. A cry of horror burst from his lips—he had just recognized Monsieur d'Assonville.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE AGONY.

The pistol shot fired by Belle-Rose had awakened some guards; they ran up and found him whom they called Monsieur de Verval engaged in stanching the flow of blood from a man who seemed already dead, so cold and immovable he was. Two of them placed the wounded man on a litter, another ran to seek the surgeon, and Belle-Rose, as pale as Monsieur d'Assonville, had him deposited in that same pavilion where, on the night of the fire, he had first revealed his love to Madame de Châteaufort. Some convulsive tremblings alone indicated that Monsieur d'Assonville was not yet dead. The transporting of him had reopened the wounds, and the blood flowed over the satin of the sofa. The grief of Belle-Rose was calm, but frightful to see. Some tears fell drop by drop from his eyes. He who would have sacrificed his life to save Monsieur d'Assonville, saw him expiring under his eyes and for him. Meanwhile Monsieur d'Assonville, however, slowly regained his senses; light entered once again his eyes; powerful cordials had returned to the blood its natural circulation. He turned his gaze toward the assembly, saw Belle-Rose, smiled, and extended him his hand. Belle-Rose took it and fell upon his knees, blessing God.

"I had seen you, my friend," said Monsieur d'Assonville, in very low tones, "but I thought I was dreaming. At least I shall not die alone!"

"But you will not die, captain!" exclaimed the soldier.

"Bah! better to-day than to-morrow; the worst is over."

Monsieur d'Assonville collected his strength and succeeded in slightly raising himself; his cheeks and his lips became purple. The surgeon who had arrived observed him in silence. The man was beyond his power.

"I have many things to say to you, my friend," resumed the wounded man; "it is a sort of confession; to aid me to finish it, give me something to drink; my tongue is parched and my breast on fire."

Belle-Rose turned to the surgeon.

"What must I give Monsieur d'Assonville?" he said to him.

"What he wishes, milk or whisky."

Belle-Rose administered a cordial that was at hand.

"Lost!" he murmured, in a choking voice.

"Minutes are worth days," said the wounded man. "See to it that we are alone."

Belle-Rose made a sign of the hand, and each one went out.

"Place yourself there," said Monsieur d'Assonville, pointing out to him a fauteuil. "My voice is weak. I should not like to die before having told you all."

"Will you pardon me, my God!" exclaimed Belle-Rose; "they have struck you, and it is I whom they sought."

"You!" said Monsieur d'Assonville, astonished.

"Am I not a deserter?"

"Bah! deserters are arrested, not assassinated. If some remorse pursues you, calm your conscience; I have recognized the enemy—it is I whom he was expecting."

"You saw him! His name, so that I may at least avenge you."

"Avenge me! and why? Perhaps it is a service which he has rendered me. He was masked; but in the heat of the action his mask fell. I only saw him a minute, and I recognized him. 'Recollect Monsieur de Villebrais!' he exclaimed, and fled."

"Monsieur de Villebrais! It was I whom he sought, I tell you! Do you not know that I struck him?" said Belle-Rose.

"Does a quarrel of yesterday sharpen a sword like a hatred of ten years? I have seen the arm—he assassinated by order."

Belle-Rose shivered from head to foot.

"Dismiss this," continued Monsieur d'Assonville, with a sad smile; "I am dead; what difference does it make by whom and why I am killed! Other thoughts besiege me, and my mind is troubled. Listen, before I die; afterward, avenge me if you wish."

Belle-Rose took Monsieur d'Assonville's hand and pressed it.

"Do you promise me to perform all my last requests?"

"I swear it."

"I counted on it. Monsieur de Naucrais, my brother, is the possessor of a letter addressed to you. I handed it to him on leaving the army.

"I was acquainted with your duel and your disappearance, but I knew you innocent. My conscience answered to me for you. 'He will return,' I said to myself, 'and what I charge him with doing, he will do.' You see that I was not deceived."

A fit of coughing stopped Monsieur d'Assonville; he carried a handkerchief to his lips, and withdrew it stained with a bloody foam.

"My God! you are killing yourself!" exclaimed Belle-Rose.

"Monsieur de Villebrais has slightly aided me to do so," replied the captain, with a smile.

"Put off the rest of your revelation till to-morrow; to-morrow you will be more calm."

"My friend, the dead do not speak. If you wish to hear what I have to say to you, you must listen to me to-night——"

A burning blush covered the cheeks of Monsieur d'Assonville, and to it succeeded the pallor of marble. Fever made his teeth chatter. Belle-Rose went from one end of the room to the other, wringing his hands.

"I suffer slightly," said the captain; "why did he not kill me at the first blow? I stifle, and I am always thirsty, give me drink——"

Belle-Rose presented him a cup filled with milk. The captain drank a swallow of it.

"That is a diet-drink you are giving me! Have you not a bottle of old Burgundy?"

Belle-Rose drew a flask from a cupboard and filled a glass. He remembered the surgeon's words. If Monsieur d'Assonville had asked him for whisky, he would have given it to him. The wounded man swallowed two glasses in succession.

"Well and good!" said he, "if death comes, it will find me prepared."

He made an effort to rise and sat down. His face suddenly grew colored, his eyes were inflamed, he smiled. In that supreme moment, when life was struggling with death, the features of Monsieur d'Assonville were lit up by a wonderful beauty. Belle-Rose thought he saw him as on that day when, near the abbaye de St. Georges, he quitted the Hungarian cavaliers.

"Therefore," said the captain, "do what I asked you? I leave content. And nevertheless I have not seen her! You understand me, you who love! To leave without the hand of a woman constantly adored having pressed yours—'tis a great grief! Such is the fate reserved to me. Oh! I have indeed suffered! You do not know all, you have not read in that heart where lived a dear and bitter recollection; it has dried up the springs of hope. When one has loved as I have loved, and solitude follows, it is necessary to die—I am dying! You weep. Have I then anything to regret? She had killed my soul before killing my body."

The glow of fever shone in Monsieur d'Assonville's eyes, and about his mouth rested a fleeting smile. He stopped himself for a moment; his eyes strayed over the room and then again fixed themselves upon Belle-Rose.

"It is you who picked me up," he suddenly said to him, "you who carried me here. Who has brought you here?"

Belle-Rose blushed.

"I was pursued," replied the sergeant, "an exile was offered me in this chateau, and I accepted it."

"A kind action! Take care, under this exile there is perhaps a tomb."

Belle-Rose looked at Monsieur d'Assonville, whose words appeared inexplicable to him; the complexion of the dying man had become livid; his voice was disturbed, the agitation of his face extraordinary.

"Some one has saved you! One day I also was saved when fleeing. It was many years ago, and I was twenty years of age. A young girl came to me, gave me her hand, led me on. The cries of my enemies were lost in the distance, and the angel who saved me released my hand and blushed. How beautiful she was, my God! She concealed me some days—I loved her all my life! She also loved me; my transports delighted her, her love dazzled me. How many times have I not returned to that retreat where she appeared to me for the first time! I was intoxicated! the sight of her was heaven to my heart. If she had said

to me, 'I wish to be queen,' I would have conquered a crown, sword or poniard in hand, I would have marched over the dead body of my king! This love was an abyss of joy and delight. A year, I was plunged therein; I came back mournful, wounded, bowed down. The evening before I would have ridiculed the elect in their eternal felicity; the next day my heart was a hell! Mademoiselle de La Noue had married."

"Mademoiselle de La Noue!" repeated Belle-Rose.

"Have I named her?" exclaimed Monsieur d'Assonville. "For many years that terrible name has not passed my lips. It is buried here as in a tomb," he added, pressing his breast with both hands; "forget it—she had married, you understand, and yet she was a mother!"

The sweat beaded upon Monsieur d'Assonville's forehead, and words came to his lips like a rattle. Belle-Rose listened to him, not certain but what delirium was influencing his reason.

"Mother! do you hear? she was a mother. Oh! my child! my God, my child!"

Monsieur d'Assonville's voice was stifled by sobs. Tears burst from the eyes of that man whom Belle-Rose had never seen weep. A profound pity welled up in the heart of the soldier.

"The monster!" said he.

"One day the poor child was taken from me," resumed the captain. "It could barely prattle, and never, no doubt, has it known my name."

"But what became of her?" said Belle-Rose.

"She? Oh! she is rich, powerful, honored! She is a lady so proud and so high-placed that the greatest lords bow at her name."

"Oh! I will avenge you!" exclaimed Belle-Rose.

"But I love her, and it is my child whom I wish!" replied Monsieur d'Assonville.

The captain was frightful to behold. His face was white as a shroud, and from his eyes there fell great tears of despair; love and suffering gave to his physiognomy, already bearing the seal of death, a heart-rending and sublime expression. At this moment, the noise of a carriage rolling in the court troubled the profound silence. The carriage stopped; Belle-Rose saw shining through the blinds the torches of the outriders; the rustling of a silk dress reached his ear, the door of the pavilion opened, and Madame de Châteaufort appeared upon the threshold. Monsieur d'Assonville turned his head, saw her, and

leaped to his feet, uttering a terrible cry. At this cry, Madame de Châteaufort stopped, pale and mute; a profound terror was depicted upon her countenance. The eyes of the dying man and hers were fixed steadily upon each other. As he leaned toward her, the arms of the duchess moved in an agitated manner. Monsieur d'Assonville made three steps forward, raised his hands to heaven and fell. Belle-Rose rushed to him. He was dead. Madame de Châteaufort knelt down. The frightened gaze of Belle-Rose went from the dead body to Genevieve; a horrible thought chilled his heart, and his glance seemed to ask his sweetheart to account for the death of his friend.

"Assassinated!" said he.

"Oh! 'tis not I who am responsible for it!" exclaimed Madame de Châteaufort.

And with hands joined, bathed in tears, she tried to crawl upon her knees; but, overcome by fright, she sank down, and her head struck the carpet. Belle-Rose went out, tottering like a drunken man; a horrible thought troubled his soul. Passing through the court, the waiting woman, impatient at that long silence, questioned him as to what was taking place in the pavilion.

"What was Madame de Châteaufort's maiden name?" Belle-Rose asked her, in a choking voice.

"Mademoiselle de La Noue," replied Camille, and she entered the pavilion.

CHAPTER XV.

A STEP TOWARD THE TOMB.

Camille, on entering the pavilion, found Madame de Chateaufort fainting near the dead body of Monsieur d'Assonville, whom she recognized at the first glance. She understood clearly then the question of Belle-Rose; but without stopping to calculate the import of it, she called, and some lackeys aided her to transport their mistress into her apartment. The events which had resulted from this catastrophe had succeeded each other so suddenly that Madame de Châteaufort could not resist their impetuosity. This strong and energetic woman seemed overwhelmed by a single stroke. She remained for several hours rigid and cold; life was betrayed only by the tears which fell from her half-closed eyes and by the trembling of her face, where was reflected all the anguish of terror and despair.

Madame de Châteaufort had arrived in the afternoon at her Paris hotel, and had only taken time to change her clothing before going in a fiacre to the house in the Rue Cassette. Monsieur d'Assonville had presented himself there the evening before and the same day. Madame de Châteaufort sent to his home and learned that he had gone out; but, upon being advised that he would probably return during the evening, she asked the lackey to inform him that he was expected in the Rue Cassette. Unfortunately Monsieur d'Assonville having, on his part, gone to Madame de Châteaufort's hotel, a few moments before the duchess' arrival at Paris, he was informed by a valet that she intended to prolong her sojourn in the country. He decided immediately as to what he should do; he knew the park and its secret issues, the passages which led to the duchess' apartments, and, thoroughly convinced by her silence that she was firmly decided to avoid every interview, he wished to penetrate to her room at night, even should he perish in the attempt. Just as Madame de Châteaufort entered Paris, Monsieur d'Assonville left it. When he perceived Ecouen, he stopped and waited for night, not wishing to present himself before the chateau gate, thinking that he would be refused admittance. When twilight came he gained the walls of the park, concealed himself in a thicket, and when darkness prevailed everywhere, he sought the secret door at the angle of the wall where, in happier times, the light feet of a woman had so often accompanied him. He found it open and advanced rapidly through the park. But Monsieur de Villebrais, who was seeking Belle-Rose, seeing a man coming down the avenue which led to the chateau, threw himself upon him, thinking that it was his rival. "Defend yourself, scoundrel!" he cried to him. Monsieur d'Assonville had scarcely time to draw his sword before a thrust pierced his breast; enfeebled by a recent wound, he could not oppose a long resistance to the attacks of his assassin, and fell just as Belle-Rose was coming to his aid. While these things were taking place at the chateau, Madame de Châteaufort was waiting, filled with a feverish impatience, in the house in the Rue Cassette. The hours succeeded each other without Monsieur d'Assonville appearing. About midnight she again sent to the captain's lodgings. News came back that Monsieur d'Assonville's valet had returned after having quitted his master upon the route to St. Denis. Madame de Chateaufort did not say a word, but Camille understood to what anguish she was a

prey, by the look which her mistress threw her. A moment after, both mounted a carriage and hurriedly took the road to Ecouen. The rest is known. Belle-Rose wandered about till morning, struggling with all his soul against madness and despair. Monsieur d'Assonville was dead, and she whom Monsieur d'Assonville loved was his mistress. Belle-Rose reproached himself with the death of the captain, and remorse entered his soul along with grief. The freshness of the dawn calmed his agitation; a duty was left him to fulfill, the voice of honor prevailed, in the tumult of his thoughts, and he heard its voice. Belle-Rose bid adieu for the last time to the inanimate body of his protector, wrote some lines which he addressed to Madame de Châteaufort, also two notes which he sent to Cornelius and Claudine, to inform them of his departure and his resolution to go to see Monsieur de Naucrais, saddled a horse and left the chateau at a gallop. The duchess had scarcely awoke from her long fainting, when she heard the park gate roll upon its hinges and the shoes of a horse striking the pebbles. She hastily arose, and at a bound reached the balcony; a cloud of dust was whirling along the road. She saw Belle-Rose disappear under the white, winding sheet, and her heart repeated his name.

The next moment a lackey presented himself, letter in hand.

Madame de Châteaufort took this letter, and, falling upon a sofa, made a sign to the lackey to retire. She broke the seal, and with eyes full of tears read:

"MADAME:—You have deprived me of the right of avenging Monsieur d'Assonville, but I recommend to you his mortal remains; give to his body the repose which you have refused to his heart. Monsieur d'Assonville has charged me with a sacred mission. What he wished, I shall wish; so act that I may never be forced to hate you.

"BELLE-ROSE."

Madame de Châteaufort threw herself back pale and inanimate. She no longer had either voice to complain or tears to weep; a burning fever devoured her. In the meantime Belle-Rose, leaving his horse at the first relay, took a post-horse and arrived the next day at Cambria, where Monsieur de Naucrais' regiment then was. Monsieur de Naucrais was working in his room when Belle-Rose presented himself before the soldier on guard. At the sound of his voice, Monsieur de Naucrais leaped from his chair and ran himself to open the door; scarcely had Belle-Rose passed it, when his captain repulsed him violently.

"You come when you are no longer expected," he exclaimed; "but you must have thought that it was never too late to get yourself hung."

"I shall be judged, Monsieur le Vicomte, but that is not the only motive which brings me."

"Parbleu! it is the only one which will retain you! If you no longer recollect the odor of powder, you will be made to smell it close enough to no longer forget it."

"Permit me to believe that the thing is not yet done."

"Eh! morbleu! you have taken care to arrange things so as to avoid all uncertainty. You give my lieutenant a sword thrust, and afterward desert. But it does not require half that to get a man shot. Could you not stay where you were?"

"I have staid there too long."

"Then you should have staid there always. The idea of being an honest man takes you a little late."

"Captain!"

"Are you going to get vexed now?"

"I surrender—is it not enough?"

"It is too much, morbleu! Since you had enough of the soldier's trade, you should have remained a deserter. What the devil do you wish me to say to Monsieur d'Assonville, my brother, when he learns that I have had you shot?"

At Monsieur d'Assonville's name, Belle-Rose stifled a sigh.

"Ah! you sigh!" resumed Monsieur de Naucrais, who was walking the room, masking under the appearance of anger the interest he felt in Belle-Rose. "Monsieur de Villebrais, they say, is a bad man; but he is your officer. Still if you had gone to get yourself massacred elsewhere, I should have washed my hands of it."

"Monsieur le Vicomte," said Belle-Rose, "it will be as God sees fit; but permit me to dismiss this subject. I have other duties to fulfil."

"Other duties! Are you mad? You have none other than to go to prison."

"I will go presently; but tell me, I pray you, if you have not a package of Monsieur d'Assonville to hand me."

"Parbleu! I had forgotten it. Here it is. If my brother charges you with some commission, he chooses well his time. He is in Paris now, I imagine; have you seen him? how is he?"

At this question, Belle-Rose grew pale.

"Do you hear me?" said Monsieur de Naucrais. "Oh, if

you do not wish to speak," he added, on seeing the hesitation of Belle-Rose, "keep your secret. My brother has always been the most mysterious man in the world; he has a multitude of obscure affairs of which I have never understood anything. If they are yours also—carry them out together."

"Alas! Monsieur d'Assonville will have them no more!" said Belle-Rose, sadly.

Monsieur de Naucrais stopped himself short.

"What did you say?" he exclaimed.

"Monsieur d'Assonville is dead," replied the soldier.

"Dead!" repeated the captain, and he leaned against the mantel. His legs trembled under him.

Belle-Rose related to him the details of the tragic events of which he had been a witness, suppressing, however, the particulars which concerned him personally, as well as Madame de Châteaufort. Monsieur de Naucrais listened to him with eyes fixed on his. Each word of this funereal narrative reached his heart; but he struggled with all his strength against the emotion which seized him.

"Yes," said he, after Belle-Rose had ceased speaking, "that is the way it must have been. My brother was kind, brave, loyal, and frank, the other is a debauched wretch; they have met—my brother is dead; thus goes the world. The coward triumphs where the brave man succumbs. Poor Gaston! to what he might not have arrived! But he loved. A woman has placed herself between him and the marshal's baton, and this woman has made him stumble. May God curse her, the infamous creature!"

Monsieur de Naucrais, paler than a corpse, raised both his hands to heaven with a frightful expression of hatred and fury. Belle-Rose shivered from head to foot.

"Oh! if he were still living," continued the captain, "with this hand I would snatch from my brother's heart the memory of that love, even if it resulted in his death. But he is dead, my poor brother! You do not know how rough and severe I was with him; but I loved him as a father loves his child."

Conquered this time by grief, the captain fell upon a fauteuil and concealed his head between his hands. He was weeping. Belle-Rose softly approached and took him by the hand. The captain answered this movement by a pressure of the hand.

All at once Monsieur de Naucrais arose.

"Enough tears," said he. "A thousand sobs would not give my brother one hour of life. It is a question of you

now. You are a brave and honest soldier, and Monsieur de Villebrais is a wretched officer who has more pride than courage. You have struck him, and you have done well. You had right and justice on your side. Nevertheless you will be shot. Discipline requires it, and discipline must be obeyed. Give me your hand and go to your dungeon."

Monsieur de Naucrais rang. Corporal Déroute appeared. Monsieur de Naucrais exchanged a last look with Belle-Rose and turned quickly from him. He was no longer the friend—he was the officer.

"Corporal," said he to Déroute, "here is the deserter Belle-Rose whom I confide to you. Take him to the dungeon and return to get my order for the convocation of the court-martial. Go."

Déroute carried his hand to his hat and went out. No sooner had they passed the door, when the corporal threw himself upon the sergeant's neck.

"Death of my life! you have had a ridiculous idea," said Déroute, "but patience, all is not finished."

"There are three or four days left, I believe."

"Between the evening before and the next day, there is room for a project."

"What do you mean?"

"We have not the leisure to talk in this corridor. I must first place you in the dungeon. Afterward I go to the captain, and if I obtain his permission to command the men on guard, I am content."

"Ask him on my part, and he will consent."

"Parbleu, I was thinking of that. Let us march quickly; we will have time to talk after."

In five minutes the dungeon door was closed upon him.

"Sit down," said Déroute. "I go and return."

The dungeon was a low hall adjoining the barrack of the artillery men. The windows were furnished with great iron bars. Belle-Rose paced to and fro. One of the windows gave upon the beat, where a soldier was promenading, with a musket on his shoulder. As Belle-Rose looked out he perceived Déroute approaching with rapid strides.

"Well, I come from the captain. Eh! he has done things well," and Déroute entered.

"Really!"

"Through friendship for you, and in order to shorten your stay in the dungeon, he advances the judgment and execution. We spoke of four days—you will be shot in forty-eight hours."

CHAPTER XVI.

THE EVE OF THE LAST DAY.

At the corporal's words, Belle-Rose looked at the plain which was radiant with the splendor of a beautiful day. The corporal observed this look.

"That is to say you will be shot in forty-eight hours if I wish it," he added.

"Has the presidency of the councils of war fallen to you?" asked Belle-Rose, languidly.

"I command the place, and it shall not be said that I have done nothing to save you from their muskets. I have my project, and I intend to execute it."

Belle-Rose, astonished, turned to the corporal who, while talking, had just bolted the door.

"Two precautions are better than one," continued Déroute Let us close the door and talk low. Here is a chair; sit down, and above all listen to me well."

The corporal sat down beside the sergeant and continued in these terms:

"Monsieur de Naucrais has placed me in command of the guard. That is what I wished. The court-martial assembles to-morrow morning; you will be condemned to-morrow evening, and after the promulgation of the sentence, you will be taken to the dungeon of the provost guard, where you will be confided to the hands of the provost of the company, and the next day at noon, in the presence of the whole garrison, you will be shot."

"I thank you for these details, my friend; they interest me much," said Belle-Rose.

"Listen to the end; the rest will interest you more. If I waited till the provost closed the door of his dungeon upon you, you understand that the intervention of Corporal Déroute would not be very useful to you; those in the care of the provost do not escape. But between this honest prison in which we are talking and his cursed dungeon, there are twenty-four hours. It is more time than I need to effect your escape."

Belle-Rose bounded in his chair.

"Escape!" he exclaimed.

"Undoubtedly! Do you think, then, that Corporal Déroute is one of those who forget their friends? I love you and will save you."

"And you will get yourself shot."

"What difference does that make to you, if it suits me? But they will not hold me since I decamp at the same time as you."

"You, too?"

"Certainly. My project is a fine one, as you can judge for yourself. The men who are to compose the night watch all belong to our squad; they are good comrades who would face the devil for you. When they have assembled, I shall range them in a circle and will say to them something like this: 'Children, there is a brave sergeant inside who has often given us ten hours' leave when we merited the lock-up' 'It is true,' they will reply. 'Certainly it is true,' I will then make answer; 'therefore, comrades, each one must have his turn; he has sent us to walk, give him some air. You will go to sleep, I will open the door, you will see nothing, and he will go away. It is your corporal who orders you. Go to bed.'"

"And you believe that they will sleep?"

"That is to say they will place their fists over their eyes and their thumbs in their ears; I know them. Five minutes after, we will flee like partridges through the fields. What do you think of the project?"

"It is charming; I only see one difficulty about it."

"What is it?"

"The difficulty is that it does not please me to escape."

It was the corporal's turn to bound in his chair.

"It does not please you? Come, you are joking."

"No, I speak seriously; it is my idea."

"Well! if it suits you to remain, it suits me to open the door."

"Then you will leave alone."

"No, I will wait."

"But you will be arrested at daybreak."

"I counted on that."

"And you will be shot."

"I agree with you there."

"Go to the devil."

"I prefer to remain here."

Belle-Rose left his seat and made some turns in the prison. Déroute, leaning back in his chair, played with his thumbs. The sergeant stopped before that honest face which was at the same time resolute.

"My friend," he said to him, taking him by the hand, "what you wish to do is madness."

"Not more than what you do not wish to do."

"Your mind is made up, then?"

"Perfectly. I was a groom, I am a corporal, I will be dead—that is all."

"But, supposing I accept, have you reflected on the difficulties of your project?"

"Bless me! if one thought of everything, one would never attempt anything."

"There is the sentinel making the round."

"It is a risk to run."

"The patrol who go and come around the ramparts."

"It is their trade to see people, it will be ours to avoid them."

"We shall be overtaken before we gain the frontier."

"At the mercy of God!"

Belle-Rose stamped. The corporal continued to twirl his fingers.

"After all, do what you wish," exclaimed the sergeant; "if you are shot, it will be your own fault."

"Agreed," said Déroute, and he rose to go.

The day was over, and the dinner hour had come. The corporal went out to fulfil the duties of his charge. He had to watch at the same time over the mess and over his prisoner. He had scarcely passed the door, when Belle-Rose, drawing a pencil from his pocket, hastily wrote some words upon a slip of paper. When he had finished, he approached the window which gave upon the yard; a sapper was close by.

"Do you wish to render me a service, comrade?" Belle-Rose said to him.

"If the instructions permit me, willingly."

"Then take this letter and carry it immediately to Monsieur de Naucrais. If he is not at home, search for him till you have found him, and do not return without having placed it in his own hands."

"It is pressing, then?"

"Somewhat. It concerns a man's life."

"I shall run, then."

Monsieur de Naucrais, entirely wrapped up in the grief caused by his brother's death, had given orders that he should not be disturbed; but at the name of Belle-Rose he had the sapper introduced and took the letter. It only contained these lines:

"CAPTAIN:—If you were not Monsieur de Naucrais, I should say nothing to you of what has passed between Corporal Déroute and myself; but in confiding to you this secret, I am sure that instead of

punishing him, you will prevent my poor comrade from destroying himself. Déroute counts on assisting me to escape to-night. I have vainly attempted to dissuade him, he persists, and exposes himself to be shot to save me. I no longer cling to life, and whatever he may do, I am resolved to submit to my fate, but I do not wish to make him share it. He is an honest man, whom I should regret much to see die. Protect him against himself. BELLE-ROSE."

Monsieur de Naucrais crumpled up the letter.

"Say to Belle-Rose that I will do what he asks," said he to the sapper, who left the room.

"He has a true soldier's heart!" exclaimed Monsieur de Naucrais, when he was alone; "my brother and he, one after the other. Only the good die."

And the captain, exasperated, broke with his fist a little table against which he was leaning.

An hour after the sapper's return, Belle-Rose saw Corporal Déroute enter his prison. The poor corporal wore a frightened countenance.

"We are betrayed!" said he, falling upon a chair.

"Really!" replied Belle-Rose, affecting a great surprise.

"The captain has learned everything. Some mischievous artilleryman must have heard us. I was swallowing my soup when a cannoneer came on the part of the captain to order me to instantly appear before him. I go. Scarcely are we alone, when Monsieur de Naucrais makes me a sign to approach. 'I know all,' he said to me. At these words I grow troubled and stammer a reply of which I understood nothing myself. 'Peace,' he continues. 'I have no proofs, you will not appear then before a council of war; but to deprive you of any desire to begin again, I send you to the lock-up. You will remain there three days. If you were not a good soldier, I would make you taste the sprouts. Take this and march.' I leave thoroughly stupefied and find outside three cannoneers who bring me back here. During the route, I examine what the captain had placed in my hand. It was a purse, in which I have counted a dozen louis. The lock-up and gold, all at the same time—I did not understand it. The sergeant who has replaced me in command of the post has permitted me to enter a moment. What an adventure!"

"You need not grieve—we would not have succeeded."

"Bah! the night is black, and we have good legs."

"I prefer to see you in prison. You risked your life and I do not cling to mine."

"This evening, it is possible; but to-morrow! Hold, I will never console myself for it."

The butt-end of a musket striking the door interrupted him.

"They are recalling me," said Déroute. "Already!"

He arose and made two turns about the room. A second blow from the butt-end of the musket warned him to make haste.

"Good!" he exclaimed, "my three cannoneers are afraid of catching a cold! Adieu, sergeant."

"Do you wish to embrace me, my friend?"

"Do I wish it? I did not dare to ask it of you."

Déroute threw himself upon Belle-Rose's neck and held him in his arms for a long time.

A third knock at the door was heard. Déroute ran to it, opened it quickly, and disappeared. He was stifling. When Belle-Rose no longer heard the noise of the cadenced steps of the little escort, he drew from his pocket Monsieur d'Assonville's folded paper and read the contents of it. It was a sort of will by which the young captain appointed Belle-Rose his executor by revealing to him the existence of a child which he had had by Mademoiselle de La Noue before her marriage with the Duc de Châteaufort. This child had disappeared, and Monsieur d'Assonville charged Belle-Rose with getting possession of it, at the same time turning over to him the divers papers which might aid him in his researches. Belle-Rose was obliged to interrupt this reading at least ten times. Burning tears furrowed his cheeks. He felt his life escaping through the wounds in his heart. The name of Genevieve—that name filled with horror and intoxication—returned unceasingly to his lips mixed with that of Monsieur d'Assonville, and to escape the disorder of his thoughts, the recollection of Suzanne was the only exile in which his riven soul could take refuge. But was not Suzanne also lost to him! On all sides were hopes destroyed. The flowers of his youth had scarcely opened to the light before they were withered, and in his short life, which musket balls were so soon going to finish, he saw nothing except mournful griefs and sterile struggles.

"The will of God be done!" said he, and throwing himself upon his knees, he prayed.

When the first rays of dawn lit up the pale hill-sides, Belle-Rose was still writing. Before him were some letters addressed to Madame d'Albergotti, to Claudine, to his father, to Cornelius O'Brien, to Madame de Châteaufort, and to Monsieur de Naucrais. More calm, he threw himself upon the camp-bed while waiting the hour for the

court-martial. At nine o'clock in the morning a squad of sappers appeared at the door of the dungeon. An officer appeared upon the threshold, sword in hand, and made a sign to Belle-Rose to advance. Five minutes after, he entered the hall of the court-martial, which was presided over by the major of the regiment. Monsieur de Naucrais was seated to the right of the major. His face appeared calm; only it was very pale. Before a table, opposite the major, a clerk was to be seen. The squad ranged themselves in front of the tribunal, and Belle-Rose remained standing slightly in front. The hall was filled with curiosity seekers, among which were to be remarked a large number of soldiers. On the arrival of the sergeant, a great commotion took place in this crowd; a deep silence soon succeeded it. The clerk first read the accusation, which declared that Sergeant Belle-Rose, after having grievously wounded his lieutenant, had rendered himself guilty of the crime of desertion. After this reading, the major passed to the questioning of the prisoner.

"Your name?" said he.

"Jacques Grinedal," said Belle-Rose, "sergeant in the company of Monsieur de Naucrais."

At his name, Monsieur de Naucrais trembled, and during the rest of the questioning remained with head bowed.

"Your age?" continued the president.

"Twenty-three."

After the clerk had recorded these divers responses in the *procès-verbal*, Belle-Rose was asked if he had not wounded his lieutenant, Monsieur le Chevalier de Villebrais, somewhere close to Neuilly. Belle-Rose answered this question affirmatively; but in justification of his honor as a soldier, he begged the tribunal to hear him, and, upon the authorization of the major, he related the scene which had resulted in the duel. This declaration was listened to in profound silence. A murmur traversed the assembly. The crowd absolved the soldier.

The major picked up a package of papers.

"The confessions of the accused," said he, "are in conformity with the written and signed declarations sent us from Paris; one comes from the coachman who drove the sergeant and his sister; the other is from an Irish gentleman, Cornelius O'Brien, who witnessed the combat. They have not been contradicted by Monsieur de Villebrais, to whom they have been transmitted and whose absence we regret at this moment."

After the hearing of these facts, the court-martial, con-

sidering the action of Belle-Rose as a case of legitimate defense, dismissed the accusation of a criminal attempt against the person of an officer. The crime of desertion alone remained for consideration.

"After your duel with Lieutenant Villebrais, why did you not return to Laon, where your company then was?" said the major.

"That was my first intention, but an accident prevented me."

"A wound, perhaps?"

"Yes, major."

"But you might have written and set out after your cure."

"That is true."

"By remaining where you were, do you know that you rendered yourself guilty of the crime of desertion?"

"I know it and recognize myself as guilty."

"Have you some explanations to give as to the causes of your absence?"

Belle-Rose shook his head. The major exchanged some words with the members of the court-martial, and, turning to Belle-Rose, asked him if he had anything to add in his defense. Upon his negative reply, he ordered him to be taken back to prison. The squad of infantry went out with the accused, the hall was vacated, and the court entered on its deliberations.

Toward evening the sergeant of the guard opened the prison door.

"Rise, comrade, and follow me," he said.

"Where do you take me?" asked Belle-Rose.

"Bless me! to a place where one goes but once."

"To the dungeon of the provost guard?"

The sergeant bowed.

"Well," continued Belle-Rose, "I understand."

He was placed between four cannoneers and taken to the dungeon, which was not in the same building. It was a small, narrow, vaulted room which received its light through two dormer-windows provided with strong iron bars. A pallet was in one corner, a bench against the wall, and a wooden Christ on the door. It was a somber, cold, and humid place, something like the antechamber of a sepulcher. The provost of the regiment received Belle-Rose and placed his name upon the dungeon register. A moment after the adjutant and clerk entered. The clerk held a paper in his hand. Belle-Rose uncovered himself,

and the sentinels presented arms. Flambeaux were lit, and the clerk read the judgment of the court-martial.

"What is the hour set for execution?" asked Belle-Rose.

"To-morrow morning, at eleven o'clock."

"I will be ready, monsieur."

"If you are of our holy religion, does it please you to have a confessor?"

"I was just going to ask you to procure me one."

The clerk made a sign to the provost, who went out and came back at the end of ten minutes with a priest. Everybody withdrew, and when the door was closed, Belle-Rose remained alone with the man of God.

CHAPTER XVII.

A WOMAN'S HAND.

The next day at ten o'clock the provost entered the dungeon. Belle-Rose was sleeping upon the pallet, after a night passed in pious exhortations, fatigue of body having triumphed over anguish of mind. The priest was praying, kneeling under the image of Christ. The provost struck the condemned man upon the shoulder.

"Stand, sergeant," said he, "the hour has come."

Belle-Rose obeyed at once. The priest advanced toward him.

"My father, pardon me my faults," the soldier said to him, falling upon his knees.

The priest raised his hands to heaven.

"Condemned by men, I absolve you before God," said he; "you have suffered, go in peace."

And with his finger he traced the sign of the cross upon the prisoner's forehead. Then the priest and soldier embraced each other. Belle-Rose still wore the clothing given him by Madame de Châteaufort. He took off his justaucorps, and asked the provost to permit him to make a present of it to the jailer; as to the money which he carried in his belt, he turned it over to him for distribution among the soldiers who were serving as guards.

"I except five louis," said he, "which I give to the fusileers; I owe them something for their trouble."

A lieutenant in full uniform appeared upon the threshold of the door.

"Sergeant Belle-Rose, forward!" said he.

Twenty cannoneers were waiting for the condemned. All were mournful, and all lowered their eyes when Belle-Rose appeared, accompanied by the priest who kept on the right side of him. The lieutenant himself appeared touched and bit his mustache. Belle-Rose saluted the officer first, then the soldiers, whose ranks opened to receive him. The signal was given, and the troop took up its march. The sergeant wore a vest of white moire with golden net-work which contracted his waist and enhanced his good looks; his head was bare, and his hair, which he wore very long, hung in curls around his neck. Half of the company was drawn up outside of the barrack of the cannoneers, under the orders of the first lieutenant. It ranged itself in line and took up the way to the ramparts. A profound silence reigned in the ranks. From time to time, a soldier coughed and carried his hand to his eyes. Belle-Rose smiled at his comrades. The streets through which the cortege advanced were full of people; they were to be seen everywhere—along the houses, before the doors, at the windows, upon the shop-steps. All eyes sought the condemned man, a thousand exclamations came from the midst of the crowd, pity was to be read upon every face. Belle-Rose walked with a steady gait, and his face was calm and proud; a melancholy smile hovered around his mouth. At the turn of the street the priest pointed to the sky; the soldier raised his eyes. The procession advanced slowly in the midst of the crowd which swelled each minute. It reached the city gate and took its way toward a drilling field, where a thousand or twelve hundred men were drawn up in line of battle. Monsieur de Naucrais was on horseback at the head of his company. The arms sparkled in the sun, and the whole population of Cambrai covered the ramparts and the approaches of the drilling field. When the procession appeared outside the gates, the drums beat, the officers drew their swords, and the troop shouldered arms. Belle-Rose raised his forehead, bowed for a moment under the weight of recollections, and threw a firm glance at the ranks of the soldiers. Just as his escort entered the fatal inclosure, a confused noise rose up from the midst of the crowd, a thousand heads were agitated, and distant cries were heard. The crowd which came from Cambrai rushed forward, and its waves beat against the detachment in charge of Belle-Rose.

"Pardon! pardon!" the crowd cried, and this word alone rose above the tumult.

Believing that the crowd wished to deliver the prisoner by violence, the lieutenant in command of the escort gave orders to close the ranks and make ready arms. But at the moment the order was being executed a man on horseback was seen to rush through the city gate. The man was covered with mud and dust, the horse was panting, and its flanks, white with foam, were stained with drops of blood. The cavalier, no longer having a voice to cry out, brandished in the air a paper sealed with red wax. The crowd made way for him with a thousand cries of joy, and the cavalier came up at a gallop, as Monsieur de Naucrais was running, sword in hand, toward the cortege whose ranks opened. The horse passed like a thunderbolt and fell at the major's feet; but the cavalier was already on his feet, and presenting the paper stamped with the royal seal. The officers grouped themselves around the major; the crowd was silent, and a thousand soldiers, forgetting discipline, inclined their heads forward. They could hear nothing, but they listened. Disorder prevailed everywhere. All at once the circle of officers was broken, and Monsieur de Naucrais, holding the paper in one hand and his hat in the other, rode away at a headlong pace. His countenance, so mournful an hour before, was radiant. He waved his hat in the air, and in a thundering voice cried, "*Vive le roi!*" It was not yet known of what it was a question, and all the soldiers and all the people responded at the same time, and the cry of, "*Vive le roi!*" rolled like a clap of thunder from the ramparts to the plains beyond. Then all was silent. You might have heard the lark singing in the depths of the sky. Monsieur de Naucrais raised himself in his stirrups.

"Sergeant Belle-Rose, approach!" he exclaimed.

Belle-Rose advanced ten steps.

"Jacques Grinedal, otherwise known as Belle-Rose, sergeant in the company of cannoneers," continued Monsieur de Naucrais, "the king, our master, acquits you and discharges you from the penalty of death which you have incurred through the crime of desertion, and permits you to resume the dress and insignia of your grade. Therefore be it done according to his will. *Vive le roi!*"

The whole troop repeated this cry, at the same time placing their hats upon the ends of their guns, and the crowd clapped their hands with transports of joy. Belle-Rose could have been pardoned for thinking himself an important personage. The youth, good looks, and courage of the condemned, had for an hour transformed him into

a hero. Dead, he would have been forgotten next day; living, the crowd was carried away by enthusiasm. But Belle-Rose thought of nothing. What he had just heard appeared to him a dream. Monsieur de Naucrais did not think this a time for hiding his satisfaction. In the presence of the whole garrison he embraced the sergeant, who was touched more by this demonstration of affection than by all the tumult of which he was the object. At this moment, the cavalier who had brought the glad news approached Belle-Rose, and taking him by the sleeve, softly said to him:

"And will you not embrace me, too?"

Belle-Rose turned round and found himself in the arms of Cornelius O'Brien.

Half an hour after the scene which we have just related, Belle-Rose, Cornelius O'Brien, and Monsieur de Naucrais were gathered together in the captain's room.

"You undoubtedly have some things to say to each other," said Monsieur de Naucrais to the two friends; "Belle-Rose has well earned for to-day a ten-hours' leave, so remain together and dine at your ease, here or elsewhere, as you prefer. Some papers have just arrived from Paris which I must examine."

The death which he had seen so close, rendered life more sweet to Belle-Rose. If the same causes for grief subsisted, the voluntary gift which he had made of his young existence seemed to him a sufficient sacrifice, and despair no longer had the right to ask anything of him. The sacrifice had been offered, fate had refused him, so they were quits. Oftentimes it so happens that even the sincerest souls make such compromises as these, which explains things apparently inexplicable. The sergeant, miraculously saved, did not perceive the transformation which was taking place in him; but at sight of Cornelius, who was extending his hand to him across the table, he took a glass of Spanish wine, swallowed it at a draught, and, with his heart bounding joyfully, he understood that there was still room in the future for youth, hope, and love.

"I owe you my life, then!" exclaimed Belle-Rose, pressing the hand of the Irish gentleman. "One day my honor, the next day my head; if you keep on in this fashion, how shall I repay you?"

"It will be more easy to do than you think," replied Cornelius.

"Speak quickly!"

"Presently will be time enough. If you consent at once, I should be too much your debtor. Besides you only owe me the half of the debt of which you just now spoke."

"Only the half?"

"Eh! undoubtedly! That parchment which saved you from the balls I brought, but did not obtain."

"What! it is not you——"

"Eh! my God, no."

"But who, then?"

"Parbleu! some one who seems to love you madly."

Belle-Rose blushed.

"You understand," continued Cornelius.

"No, really, I am seeking——"

"If you seek, 'tis that you have found. Is it necessary to name to you madame——"

"Marquise d'Albergotti."

"No—the Duchess de Châteaufort."

At this name Belle-Rose trembled.

"Had it not been for her, you would now be dead!" continued Cornelius. "What gratitude do you not owe her? How much she has done to save you!"

The name of Madame de Châteaufort had agitated Belle-Rose's mind. He bowed his head and remained silent.

"It is a curious story," said Cornelius. "Where men are powerless, women succeed. I know of no better pass-key than a woman's white hand; it opens at the same time consciences and locks. When your letter reached Paris, where I remained without well knowing why," continued the Irishman, blushing a little, "it plunged me into a great embarassment. What to do and where to go? I began by running to the country to see your sister, Mademoiselle Claudine——"

"Ah!" said Belle-Rose, who did not fail to remark the gentleman's emotion on pronouncing this name.

"Yes; she is a young lady who has more sense than her gay eyes and sly smile would indicate. I expected good advice from her and found her in tears; she had, like myself, received a note in which you revealed your intention of presenting yourself before the court-martial at Cambrai. She would have addressed herself to Madame d'Albergotti; unfortunately this lady's husband was at Compiègne, and you would have had ten chances to be shot before his intervention could be of any service. Not knowing what to decide upon, I took at hazard the way to Monsieur de Louvois' hotel. I passed under the porte cochère, I mounted a stair-way, and entered a hall where several per-

sons were gathered together. A door was in front of me, I was going straight on, when an usher intercepted me. 'What do you desire?' he said to me. At these words, I took a desperate resolution. 'Can I not speak to His Excellency the Minister?' I said to the usher. 'Monseigneur is busy; but you will enter in your turn; what name must I announce to His Excellency?' 'He does not know me.' 'You have then a letter of introduction?' 'I have nothing.' 'In that case it is impossible for me to introduce you to monsieur le ministre. Nevertheless——' 'Do not insist, my instructions forbid it.' At this point the door opened, a gentleman withdrew, another presented himself. The usher left me, and I was alone with my reflections. All those who were waiting entered one after the other, the hour passed, and despair took possession of me.''

"Poor Cornelius!" murmured Belle-Rose.

"In my distress I was about to leave for St. Germain and throw myself at the feet of the king, when all at once a lady passes the door and takes her course toward the minister's cabinet. The usher rises and bows respectfully. 'Monsieur de Louvois?' said the lady. 'Monseigneur is busy.' 'Give him my name, I must speak to him at once.' The usher disappeared. There are certain things which are a revelation. The accent and bearing of the lady make me understand her power. 'Madame!' I exclaimed, going to her, 'deign to accord me a favor.' 'What is it?' said she, turning around. For a moment I was dazzled. The lady's glance was imperious, her lips haughty, her cheeks pale; but she was as beautiful as a fairy queen. 'Madame,' I replied, 'it concerns a poor sergeant whc has deserted.' Then she approaches and looks at me. 'He has an old father, a young sister, and is just twenty.' 'His name,' said she interrupting me. 'Belle-Rose.' The lady utters a cry and totters. I rush to her support, but already recovered from her emotion, she extends her hand to me. 'And you come to save him? You are a brave gentleman!' It seemed to me that a tear dimmed the lady's eye. 'But it is quite natural,' I said to her, 'I love him, and I love his sister.'"

Cornelius blushed and stopped himself brusquely like a horse who has just set foot on the border of a precipice. Belle-Rose raised his head. A soft smile lit up his face just now so somber.

"At last we have that great secret."

"Have I spoken? well, let it go; I will confirm it presently; in the meantime, let me continue my story; I will

come to my affairs presently. I believe that the lady did not hear me, for she said: 'But what risk does he run?' 'The risk of being shot, that is all.' She grew pale. 'Oh!' she exclaimed, 'they still shoot people, then?' 'They certainly do.' 'What shall we do, then? Supposing I prevent his trial?' 'Before that order could arrive, he will be condemned.' 'My God! advice! advice! but I, too, have come in his interest!' 'Well, madame, what we need is his pardon.' 'His pardon! I will obtain it, but who will carry it to him?' 'I will; unless I am killed on the road, I will arrive in time to save him.' 'Wait for me here—I shall return presently,' and she disappeared through the door which the usher had just opened. I remained alone for some minutes, which appeared a century to me. A thousand depressing reflections saddened my mind. Had this unknown woman the power which I supposed she possessed? was the interest which she affected real? Presently the door opens and the lady appears. I saw nothing this time except the parchment which she held in the tips of her snowy fingers. 'Hold,' she said to me, 'here is the royal seal—you have his life in your hand. Go!' Her countenance was radiant. I bowed over her hand and kissed it. 'Your name, madame, so that his father, his sister, and he himself may bless you?' 'My name? I am the Duchess de Châteaufort, but do not tell him.'"

"So she wished to favor me without my knowing it," said Belle-Rose.

"Three times she recommended to me the most absolute silence, but I have not kept that promise. There is no hatred or fault which a similar service does not wipe out. I went out with Madame de Châteaufort, whose carriage was waiting for her before the hotel. 'Make haste,' she said to me, and pressing my hand, she drove away. Half an hour later, I was galloping at headlong speed over the road to Cambrai."

"And you arrived at the right time."

"I do not know what fear scourged my soul, as I spurred on my horse, but at each relay I rode faster. A voice cried to me that your life depended on my speed, and I passed like a bullet over the route."

"And it is to Madame de Châteaufort I owe this existence so many times threatened!"

Just then Monsieur de Naucrais entered the room.

"Lieutenant," said he, "the time for conversation is past. The hour for departure has come."

"Lieutenant!" exclaimed Belle-Rose and Cornelius at the same time; "to whom do you speak, captain?"

"But to you, Belle-Rose; read for yourself."

And Monsieur de Naucrais extended to the young man a paper adorned with the arms of the king.

"I found this commission among the papers sent me from Paris. It is regular, and you have nothing left but to obey."

"A lieutenancy for me!" said Belle-Rose.

"The minister does things well when he does them," resumed Monsieur de Naucrais; "pardon, promotion, and also a hundred louis for your outfit. Here is the order for them; the treasurer of the regiment will count them out to you to-morrow."

Monsieur de Naucrais enjoyed the surprise and emotion of Belle-Rose, whose gaze went from Cornelius to the captain, and from the captain to the commission.

"You will have the reversion of Monsieur de Villebrais," continued Monsieur de Naucrais, "of Monsieur de Villebrais, whom the corps of officers dismisses from the battalion while waiting for him to render an account to God for his infamy."

"Heaven grant that he may cross my path!" exclaimed Belle-Rose.

"It is a quarrel of which I should take half," said the captain, "if he was worthy of our hatred. But let time do its work. The day which begins badly ends well, Belle-Rose, and the good news comes in quick succession. To-morrow we leave for the northern frontier."

"Does it mean war?"

"It means war, and our battalion is attached to the corps commanded by the Duc de Luxembourg. He is a valiant warrior, and under his orders you will promptly find occasion to flush your maiden sword. Hold yourself in readiness; the trumpets will sound to-morrow at daybreak."

"Parbleu! Belle-Rose," exclaimed Cornelius, when Monsieur de Naucrais had withdrawn to watch over the last preparations for departure, "fortune treats you like the coquette she is. After having sulked for an hour, she overwhelms you with favors."

"I have as yet done nothing to earn them, but I hope the Spaniards will aid me to deserve them."

"Now that your affairs are progressing nicely, will you permit me to recall mine to you?"

"Yours, my dear Cornelius? but I know them as well as

you. You love a little girl who is my sister, and from the manner in which you look at me, I have every reason to believe that this sister returns this love with her whole soul."

"It is my cherished belief."

"'Tis very well, and I approve of her having placed her affections so well. But as she is an honest girl, just as you are an honest man, I see insurmountable difficulties to the happy ending of this mutual affection."

"And what are they, if you please?"

"In the first place, my sister is thoroughly plebeian, being the daughter of a simple falconer."

"That is something to which my family alone would have the right to offer an objection, and as I alone constitute my family, you will find it good, I hope, that my nobility reconciles itself to your plebeian state."

"Nevertheless——"

"Enough on that line. Besides, if you persist therein, do not forget that you are an officer now; the sword ennobles."

"Agreed! but Claudine has almost nothing."

"That almost nothing borders so close on my very little that, without being much compromised, my fortune can ally itself to her poverty."

"You have a logic which does not permit me to continue. Behold my obstacles overthrown."

"That is what I counted upon; so you consent?"

"And the king's post will count two or three foundered horses the more."

"So much the worse for them—it is their business to run."

"Is it ours to construct fine projects which a cannon-ball may upset?"

"Bah! half of people's lives is passed in building plans; it is so much gained upon the other half."

"Therefore you will leave?"

"To-morrow, at sunrise. You will go to Flanders and I to Artois."

"And from there to Paris?"

"No, to the army, to you."

"You will enter our ranks?"

"Unquestionably! An Irishman is half a Frenchman. We will fight first, and I shall get married afterward."

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE DUC DE LUXEMBOURG.

The war of 1667 was the prelude of that great war of 1672, which announced itself like "a thunderbolt in a serene sky," to make use of the expression of the Chevalier Temple apropos of the invasion of Holland. A hundred thousand men moving at the same time, traversed the Meuse and the Sambre and conquered Flanders with the rapidity of lightning. France presented then a magnificent spectacle. A young and elegant king, in love with all great and glorious things, attracted to his court the choicest intelligences scattered throughout the kingdom. Molière and Racine made the French stage the first in the world; Louvois and Colbert administered public affairs; Condé and Turenne were at the head of the army; the most famous poets, the most illustrious writers, the most celebrated women, the most eminent prelates, a crowd of men distinguished by their science, their wit, and their virtues, filled Paris with a renown which extended even to the ends of Europe. It was an imposing gathering of orators, generals, savants, literary men, ministers, and great ladies such as is rarely to be met with in the history of empires. France was at the same time enlightened and powerful, it had the double authority of arms and letters, and its supremacy extended to all things—to those of the mind as well as to those political; it commanded by the sword and governed by the pen. During the brief respites of peace, the nations which had conquered in war came to instruct themselves at that center of light which shone in the middle of Europe, in that marvelous Paris which produces philosophers or soldiers, books or revolutions for guiding the world. Louis XIV. advised by Cardinal Mazarin, had signed on the 7th of November, 1659, the Treaty of the Pyrenees—the loss of the battle of Dunes, the taking of Dunkirk, of Gravelines, of Oudenarde and other important places, having decided Spain to propose a treaty which was accepted. By the peace signed in the Ile des Faisaus, Louis XIV. obtained the concession of Artois, Rousillon, Perpignan, Mariembourg, Laudrecies, Thionville, Philippeville, Gravelines, Montmedy, and the hand of Maria Theresa, daughter of Philip IV., and also Infanta of Spain. Louis XIV., master at home, now began to think of be-

coming master outside of it. For eight years, he applied himself to cementing alliances, to neutralizing the efforts of powers whose rivalry was to be dreaded, to making everywhere blaze the supremacy of France. Spain recognized the precedence of France as the result of a quarrel at London between the ambassadors of the two countries; Pope Alexander V. is constrained to disavow, by a public reparation, the insult offered to the French ambassador by his Corsican guard; Dunkirk and Mardick are purchased from the English for five million francs; the alliance with Switzerland is renewed, Marsul in Lorraine is taken, the Algerian pirates are punished, the Portuguese sustained against the Spaniards, and the Emperor Leopold receives a reinforcement of six thousand volunteers who aid him to fight the Turks and take a glorious part in the battle of St. Gothard. In the meantime the King of France was waiting for his hour to come; the most skilful generals commanded his army; the navy was increased; he let his ally, Holland, exhaust herself in a sterile and ruinous war against England, and was holding himself in readiness to act, when the death of Philip IV. permitted him at last to try his strength. But while formidable preparations seemed to threaten entire Europe, *fetes* filled with splendor the royal residences of Versailles and St. Germain, the stage attracted illustrious strangers, everywhere rose up splendid monuments, and the most polished as well as the most brilliant court in the world saw its days pass in the midst of the pomp of triumphant royalty and the marvels of honored intelligence. All at once, in the midst of this fruitful peace, embellished by the thousand creations of the arts, war burst out, and upon all the frontiers of the north the fires are lit. The king himself crosses the Sambre, accompanied by the best captains of the time—Condé, Turenne, Luxembourg, Créqui, Grammont, and Vauban. In this general commotion, the shocks were so sudden and so profound, that even the most insignificant, pushed forward by the chances of fortune, might aspire to the first places. When great wars or social upheavals agitate nations, audacity, intelligence, knowledge, are stepping-stones; the levels are lowered, and those who are at the bottom may hope to mount. It belongs then to those who have the energy to open a way. All these thoughts rapidly traversed Belle-Rose's mind; he glimpsed the light on the horizon and ardently prayed for the hour of combat. The next day, at daybreak, Monsieur de Naucrais sent for him in order to confide to him the organization and command

of a corps of recruits which had just been brought to Cambrai.

"I will precede you at the head of my old soldiers," the captain said to him, "You will rejoin me at Charleroi, and the sooner the better."

Belle-Rose would have preferred to leave at once, but it was necessary to obey; the mission with which he was charged was besides a proof of confidence; he resigned himself and saw leave at the same hour Cornelius and Monsieur de Naucrais, the former for St. Omer and the latter for Charleroi. The reader will readily divine that Corporal Déroute had not been the last to compliment Belle-Rose upon his new grade.

"I no longer think of the epaulettes," had said the poor corporal, "the only thing to which I aspire at present is to be under your orders. If you permit me to no longer quit you, I shall be the happiest of men."

"We will look after that when we reach the army. Monsieur de Naucrais will certainly grant me this authorization, which will give me as much pleasure as yourself."

After this assurance, Déroute, full of joy, took his way to the ramparts, where the company was drawn up in line. As he started to take his place in the ranks, Monsieur de Naucrais called him:

"Eh, rascal! where are you running to?"

"I am running to my soldiers. I have lost a little time, but I will repay you by pike thrusts in the stomachs of the Spaniards."

"You speak of pikes; what have you done with your halberd?"

"My halberd?" repeated the stupefied corporal.

"Parbleu, I express myself in French, I imagine! You have not been told that you were a sergeant, or perhaps you have forgotten it?"

"I! a sergeant!"

"You have been one for three hours."

"I have only been out of the lock-up for an hour."

"And you will go there again if you do not quickly don the insignia of your grade."

Déroute, thoroughly stupefied, saluted the captain and went away. He was very much perplexed over the motives which prompted his promotion. If he had deserved to be punished, why had he been given the halberd before the expiation of his penalty? But if his conduct, on the contrary, called for a reward, why had they begun by imprisoning him? Again, was the captain pleased or dis-

pleased? This double question troubled the understanding of poor Déroute; it was a puzzle which he could not solve.

While his company was marching toward the northern frontier Belle-Rose hurried as much as possible the organization of his recruits. He displayed so much activity that in a few days his squad was ready to leave, so that he reached the army before the opening of the campaign. The Army of Flanders was commanded by the Prince de Condé, who had under his orders the Duc de Luxembourg, the Duc d'Dumont, and other generals. The battalion of artillery of which Monsieur de Naucrais' company formed a part belonged to the corps of Monsieur de Luxembourg, and was one of the first assembled upon the banks of the Sambre, at Charleroi. When Belle-Rose reached the camp, night had fallen. He made himself recognized by the sentinels, distributed his men, and, learning that Monsieur de Naucrais was absent on some affairs of the service, he entered the tent which had been prepared for him. Belle-Rose had just unbuckled his belt and thrown aside his coat, when Déroute made his appearance. The sergeant had a depressed countenance and a mournful look, but in the *claro obscuro* of the tent, his lieutenant did not at first perceive it.

"Eh! 'tis you, my poor Déroute? Yours is the first friendly face I have met here; so welcome. Are you well?"

"Passably, thanks. It would be a good thing if every one was as well as myself."

Belle-Rose approached Déroute and looked at him. It was only then that he was struck by the dejection of his countenance.

"Speak! what has happened?" he said to him.

"A great misfortune—I do not know how to tell you——"

"Whom does it concern?"

"Our captain."

"Monsieur de Naucrais! But I have just come from the quarters, and was told that he was absent on some affair connected with the service."

"Apparently they did not yet know anything about it."

"And what do you know?"

"Monsieur de Naucrais is in prison."

"He! and why?"

"He has disobeyed the general's orders."

"An infraction of discipline on the part of our captain! It is impossible."

"I tell you that I have seen him. Would I tell you so if it were otherwise?"

"But how has it come about?"

"I do not know as yet! But what could you expect? Since his brother's death, Monsieur de Naucrais has not been himself."

"But tell me how it happened."

"This is the way: You must first know that the Duc de Luxembourg has, by an order of the day, forbidden the soldiers to venture beyond a certain limit around the camp; above all he has prescribed, under penalty of death, the avoidance of every species of engagement with the enemy. The proclamation has been posted everywhere, and read at the mess. It is whispered around that Monsieur de Luxembourg wishes to wait for the arrival of the king before acting, who, as you know, is to take part in person in the operations."

"Drop the king, and come to Monsieur de Naucrais."

"Now, at noon to-day, Monsieur de Naucrais was riding on horseback in the direction of Gosselies. He was accompanied by some officers of the queen's dragoons and by the Nivernais regiment. A party of Spanish skirmishers had passed the Piélou and were pillaging a hamlet. All at once a cornet of dragoons, who had come straight from the court to the camp, draws his sword. 'Devil take the orders!' he exclaimed; 'it shall not be said that an officer of the king saw the king's flag burnt without unsheathing his sword.' He sets spurs to his horse and leaves. The officers stop. 'Shall we leave him without defense, messieurs?' exclaims Monsieur de Naucrais, in his turn, who was urging on his horse in the direction of the hamlet. The rest follow him. 'Mordieu! they are killing him,' said the captain, 'forward, and *vive le roi!*'"

"You took part in the affair, then?"

"Faith, being close by, I had seen the whole thing, and I have gone where my captain went. Monsieur de Naucrais seemed a lion. Bare-headed, coat torn in twenty places, crying, '*Vive le roi*' between each blow. The frightened Spaniards broke ranks. To sum up, we had lost thirty men, without counting the wounded; but we had the village and the redoubt. When we were masters of the place, Monsieur de Naucrais marshaled the officers around him. 'Messieurs,' he said to them, 'we have committed a fault; it is grave. I am the most guilty—therefore it is mine.' 'It is ours, too!' cried these brave gentlemen. 'Then, as the oldest one among you,' continued the captain, 'it is my duty to render an account to the Duc de Luxembourg of what has taken place.' Monsieur de Nau-

crais threw aside his notched saber, and tranquilly took up the way to the general's quarters. He reached it an hour ago, and only left it to go from the general's apartments to prison."

"Are you sure of it?"

"I met him, and, having seen me, he made me a sign to approach."

"'My fate is sealed, Déroute,' he said to me. 'If Belle-Rose arrives during the night, tell him to try to see me. An hour after sunrise it will be too late."

Belle-Rose drew on his coat, buckled his belt, and picked up his hat.

"You are going to join him, lieutenant?" said Déroute.

"No, I am not."

"But where are you going, then?"

"To see the duke."

"He will not receive you; there is a council to-night."

"I will force my entrance."

"My lieutenant, take care——"

"Of what?"

"You risk your life."

"Well! I shall lose my life or save his."

Belle-Rose, without listening any longer to Déroute, passed the door and rapidly took his course toward the general's quarters. Déroute followed him from a distance. The first sentinels let him pass, his epaulettes and the disorder of his costume causing him to be taken for an aid-de-camp charged with an order from the Prince de Condé. But at the entrance to the house tenanted by the general, a grenadier stopped him.

"No one is allowed to pass," he said to him.

"Monsieur de Luxembourg expects me," boldly replied Belle-Rose.

"The word of order?"

"I have it not."

"Then you will not enter."

"Parbleu! we will see about that."

And Belle-Rose, overthrowing the grenadier with an irresistible force, reached the corridor at a bound. A light was shining at the top of a stair-way. He climbs it, repulses two guards, opens a door in front of him, and disappears before the sentinel even had time to cock his musket. The Duc de Luxembourg was seated in a large easy-chair; in his hand he held dispatches, and upon a table in reach of him, maps and papers were to be seen scattered. At the noise made by Belle-Rose on entering

the hall, the general exclaimed, without turning his head:

"What is it now, and what do you want with me? Have I not given orders to let no one enter?"

"Monsieur le Duc, I have forced the sentry

At these words, at the sound of this unknown voice, the Duc de Luxembourg arose.

"It is an audacity which will cost you dear, monsieur," said he, and he rang a bell.

The soldiers on guard and some officers entered.

"A word, I pray you! You can dispose of my life afterward," said Belle-Rose, just as Monsieur de Luxembourg was undoubtedly going to give the order for his arrest.

The general was silent. His eyes inflamed by anger, wandered over Belle-Rose; the disorder of the young officer, the frankness of his physiognomy, the resolution of his look, the anxiety to be read upon his countenance, touched the illustrious captain. He made a sign of the hand; everybody went out, and the Duc de Luxembourg and Belle-Rose were left alone.

CHAPTER XIX.

WHEAT AND TARES.

The general and the lieutenant looked at each other for a minute before speaking. If one had been able to read Monsieur de Luxembourg's heart, one would have seen pass therein the fugitive and uncertain light of a recollection drowned in the shadows of a stormy and active life. As to Belle-Rose, never before this hour had he found himself—at least, he thought so—in the presence of the famous captain whose renown shone with a radiant splendor even between the redoubtable names of Turenne and Condé. A respectful fear seized his soul, and his proud look was lowered before Monsieur de Luxembourg, whom he nevertheless over-topped by a whole head. The vague recollection of the general was effaced like a flash; he only saw before him now a presumptuous soldier whom it was necessary to listen to first and to punish afterward.

"What do you wish? Speak!" said he.

"I come to implore the pardon of a guilty man."

"His name?"

"Monsieur de Naucrais."

"The captain who beat the Spaniards to-day and took Gosselies?"

"A beautiful action, monsieur."

"There is no beautiful action which infringes discipline."

"The French flag was being burnt upon the king's territory."

"There was an order of the day, monsieur. Had twenty flags been burnt and fifty villages sacked, it was the soldier's duty not to budge!"

"It is a fault redeemed by the victory."

"It is not a question of conquering but obeying. If the voice of generals is not recognized, what becomes of discipline? and without discipline there is no army."

"It is the first time Monsieur de Naucrais has conquered without orders."

"It will also be the last."

"Monseigneur!"

"An example is necessary. In a time when there come to us from the court a hundred young officers who are not accustomed to war, to tolerate one such great infraction of military laws would be to authorize thirty. Monsieur de Naucrais must die."

"Pardon, monsieur le duc, listen to me."

"Eh! monsieur, who are you, then, that you should exhibit so much persistence?"

"Belle-Rose, lieutenant in the artillery corps."

"Belle-Rose! it is a singular name! Belle-Rose?"

"The name has nothing to do with the affair."

"Quite right," said the general, who could not refrain from smiling; "but are you his brother, his relative, his friend?"

"Monsieur le Naucrais is my captain."

"That means you will gain a pair of epaulettes."

"Oh! monseigneur!" said Belle-Rose, with an accent of reproach.

"Well, what? It is the custom in war; each for himself and the bullets for all."

"But——"

"Enough! I have wished to hear you, monsieur, and to forget, for a moment, the severe breach of discipline committed by you in forcing the sentry who defended my door; but this indulgence, which I hope you will not make me repent, is not a motive to justify the pardoning of the fault of which Monsieur de Naucrais has rendered himself guilty. I have already told you; Monsieur de Naucrais will be shot at daybreak to-morrow."

"No, monseigneur," exclaimed Belle-Rose boldly, "no, it shall not be!"

"And who, then, will prevent it?"

"Yourself."

"Me!"

"Yes, you!"

"Monsieur Belle-Rose, take care!" said the duke, growing pale.

"Oh! I fear nothing for myself! The right defends me as your justice should defend Monsieur de Naucrais. One does not kill a brave officer because he has blood in his veins."

"Morbleu!"

"Eh! monseigneur, if you had been in his place, perhaps you would have done as much."

At this brusque repartee, the Duc de Luxembourg could not refrain from smiling.

"Agreed," said he, "but if he were in mine, he would act like me!"

Belle-Rose continued:

"A band of pillagers insult the French flag, a captain of the king is there, and would not draw his sword to punish the insolent fellows! But it is impossible! Fire devours a village, the odor of powder mounts to your head, a horse prances, a dig of the spur is quickly given, and you go, not so much because you wished to, but because you are a man. Then, what happens? The enemy turn round, you pursue them, you kill them right and left, you fall pell-mell upon a redoubt which is carried by assault, the white flag is planted upon the rampart, and you cry, '*Vive le roi!*' you embrace your companions, and on returning, instead of a recompense, it is a musket-ball which is waiting for you. But you, monseigneur, who condemn men so quickly and so well—your feats are known! You have crossed twenty rivers, massacred ten thousand Spaniards, taken thirty redoubts! This is what you would have done, peer of France though you are, and what I would have done—I who am only a poor lieutenant."

"Well, we would have both been shot," said the general.

Belle-Rose trembled. In his generous ardor, he had for a moment forgotten the rank of the man to whom he was speaking. At these words, his youthful zeal calmed down, as does the boiling water of a vase when a cold stream is poured upon it.

"You have pleaded well Monsieur de Naucrais' cause," added Monsieur de Luxembourg, with dignity; "audacity is not unbecoming to youth, and that which you have just shown honors you and at the same time gives me a high

opinion of the character of Monsieur de Naucrais. An ordinary man does not inspire such devotion. But everything must give way to discipline. In spite of your prayer, I regret to repeat to you that Captain de Naucrais will be shot at daybreak to-morrow."

Monsieur de Luxembourg, with a noble gesture, saluted Belle-Rose, but the lieutenant did not budge. The duke frowned.

"I thought I had explained myself clearly, monsieur," said he.

"Pardon me, monseigneur, if I insist, but——"

"Ah! Monsieur Belle-Rose, I did not wish to grow offended at your audacity; but a longer insistence will oblige me to recollect who you are and who I am."

Belle-Rose smiled sadly.

"May you do so, then, if the recollection of the distance between us recalls to you that you can accomplish a good action, and that I can only ask one of you."

Monsieur de Luxembourg repressed a gesture of impatience.

"Since you do not wish to understand me, permit me, monsieur, to call for some one to reconduct you to the quarters of the artillery."

As he concluded these words, the duke approached the table to pick up the little bell, but Belle-Rose anticipated his movement, and rushing to the table, he seized the general's hand.

"Through pity, monseigneur!" said he.

A flash of anger lit up the eyes of Monsieur de Luxembourg; he quickly disengaged himself, and with one hand seizing Belle-Rose by the lapel of his coat, with the other he took a pistol which he pressed against his breast. The hammer fell, but the priming alone burned, and the duke, rendered furious, threw the weapon upon the floor. Not a muscle of Belle-Rose's face quivered. But Monsieur de Luxembourg had leaned forward. The violence of his movement had partly opened Belle-Rose's clothing, and upon the half-naked breast of the lieutenant shone a gold medallion suspended by a silk cord. The general's hand took possession of it.

"Where did you get this medallion?" he exclaimed, in a quick tone.

"I found it, monseigneur."

"Where?"

"At St. Omer."

"When?"

"In 1658. But of what importance is this medallion to you? It is a question of Monsieur de Naucrais."

"You found it at St. Omer in 1658?" said the duke.

"Yes," replied Belle-Rose, who did not understand the Duc de Luxembourg's emotion. "I was then thirteen years old."

Monsieur de Luxembourg stepped back a little and began to consider the young lieutenant. A vail seemed to disappear from his face as the examination advanced.

"Eh, yes!" he exclaimed, "I find again that vague resemblance which struck me on seeing you. Belle-Rose, did you say? but your name is not Belle-Rose! it is Jacques—Jacques Grinedal."

Belle-Rose, frightened, looked at Monsieur de Luxembourg.

"Eh! parbleu! You are Guillaume Grinedal's son. Have I not seen the falconer's little cottage?"

"You!" exclaimed Belle-Rose, who, in his turn, began to study the general's features with an eager curiosity.

"But you have not kept, then, the least recollection of a day not an hour of which is effaced from my memory. Ah! you have not given the lie to my prediction—the brave child has become a brave officer."

"The peddler!" said Belle-Rose.

"Eh, yes! the peddler become, by the grace of God, general in the king's service. The times are no longer the same, but the heart has not changed. Child, you have rendered me a service; become a man, it is my turn to serve you."

"Well, monsieur le duc, if it is true that you recollect that night passed under the roof of Guillaume Grinedal, permit me to ask you no other proof of your favor than the life of Monsieur de Naucrais."

"Again!"

"Always! I wish nothing and expect nothing for myself; but let this unhoped-for meeting save my captain as our first one has been of some aid to you, and among all the days of my life these will be two blessed days."

Monsieur de Luxembourg kept turning the medallion between his fingers, caressing with the look an image which the chased lid had just uncovered.

"You have not changed, friend Jacques," said he; "you are still the same proud and resolute fellow. Come, go. I will do for Monsieur de Naucrais everything which the military laws permit me."

Belle-Rose understood this time that he must go; he bowed to the general and went out.

At daybreak the next morning an officer of the general's household came to warn Belle-Rose that he was expected in the great council chamber. Belle-Rose donned his uniform and went out. When he entered the hall, his heart beat rapidly. The Duc de Luxembourg, surrounded by a brilliant staff, was seated in a large fauteuil; among the great officers of his suite, several wore upon the coat the insignia of their high rank.

Monsieur de Luxembourg saluted Belle-Rose with the hand, and indicated to him a place situated in a manner to give a good view of all that which was going to take place. Upon a sign from the general, everybody sat down in a profound silence, an officer went out, and a moment after the doors gave passage to Monsieur de Naucrais, who was followed by two grenadiers. Monsieur de Naucrais perceived Belle-Rose, both exchanged a smile—the one of farewell, the other of hope; then the captain bowed to the council and waited. Monsieur de Luxembourg took off his white-plumed hat and stood.

"Monsieur de Naucrais," said he, "you committed yesterday a grave breach of discipline; you who ought, as an officer, to give an example of submission, have disobeyed the orders of your superiors and merit, by that fact, a severe punishment; you are stripped of your grade. Yesterday you handed to me your sword; you must now lose your epaulettes. Gentlemen, do your duty."

At these words, two officers approached Monsieur de Naucrais and took from him the insignia of his command. Monsieur de Naucrais grew slightly pale. Belle-Rose, chilled by terror, dared not make a single movement.

"You know, monsieur, that military laws condemn you to death," continued the Duc de Luxembourg; "have you nothing to say in your defense?"

"Nothing; your sentence is just, and I have deserved it. When one violates the laws of discipline as I have done, 'tis best to die."

At these funereal words, Bell-rose concealed his head between his hands; great drops of sweat beaded upon his forehead.

"In the name of the king," resumed Monsieur de Luxembourg, "and acting by reason of the power conferred upon me, I absolve you from the penalty of death."

"You pardon me!" exclaimed the captain, making two steps forward.

"Hear me to the end, monsieur, and if you have any objections to make, you will make them afterward."

Monsieur de Naucrais crossed his arms upon his breast and was silent. Belle-Rose leaned forward to hear better what the duke was going to say. The latter continued:

"You have been punished for the fault, monsieur; it is right that you should now be rewarded for the victory."

Monsieur de Naucrais trembled, and Belle-Rose breathed like a man who, after having remained some time under the water, returns to the light.

"In the name of the king, I took from you the sword of the captain; in the name of the king, I return to you that of a colonel. Take it, then, monsieur, and if you always serve worthily your country as you have done up to now, new rewards will not be long in seeking you."

The Duc de Luxembourg extended his hand to Monsieur de Naucrais. That strong man whom the approach of death could not move, grew troubled like a child at the the general's words; he took the sword with a trembling hand, and, without voice to thank him for a favor so nobly accorded, he could only express by his emotion the extent of his gratitude. The officers surrounded him, and Monsieur de Luxembourg approached Belle-Rose.

"You have appealed from the general to the peddler," said he, "the peddler has recollected."

Belle-Rose wished to reply, but Monsieur de Luxembourg stopped him.

"I was your debtor," he said to him, kindly, "I have wished to repay you—that is all; now, instead of one protector, you have two."

A minute later it was Monsieur de Naucrais' turn.

"I know what I owe to you," said he to Belle-Rose; "if you have lost a friend in Monsieur d'Assonville, you have gained a brother in me."

A vigorous grasp of the hand terminated this laconic discourse, and the new colonel ran to make himself recognized by his regiment. As Belle-Rose was returning to the quarter of his company, a personage who was leaving it ran up against him.

"Cornelius!"

"Belle-Rose!" they exclaimed, at the same time, and the two friends embraced.

"It is a happy day," said Belle-Rose. "There are still some left in life, then!"

"There are a thousand!" replied Cornelius, whose countenance was radiant with happiness. "I have seen

your father; he calls me his son; I have seen Pierre, who wishes to be a soldier, in order to become a captain; I have here a letter from Claudine which proves to me that I am loved as much as I love—and you ask if there are happy days in life. But it is full of them."

Belle-Rose smiled.

"Bah!" continued the young enthusiast, "if I ever meet another Claudine, I will give her to you, and you will be of my opinion."

"We will look around, but while waiting to find her, you will become my brother in arms."

"Yes, certainly; I am a volunteer, and I intend to help you take Brussells."

While talking of their affairs and their hopes, the two young men had strayed from the lines. The day was warm and beautiful; they pushed on into the country. As they were entering a sunken road, a gun was fired some distance away, and the ball flattened itself against a pebble, two steps from Belle-Rose. Cornelius rushed to the bank of the road. A light cloud of smoke was floating upon the edge of a hop field.

"Oh! oh!" he exclaimed, "those are Spanish marauders. "I no longer see our camp."

"Let us turn back, then," replied Belle-Rose; "swords cannot compete with muskets."

Profiting by the hedges and ditches, Belle-Rose and Cornelius gained the approaches of the camp. The first sentry was only a hundred steps away, when Belle-Rose stumbled against a stump; at the same moment, two balls, passing above him, buried themselves in the trunk of an oak.

"Lucky fall!" said Belle-Rose, "I owe my life to it."

Some soldiers ran up on hearing this last shot, but the marauders had already disappeared.

They were traversing the camp when, at the turn of a street, Cornelius nudged Belle-Rose with his elbow.

"Look," he said to him.

Belle-Rose raised his eyes and saw Monsieur de Villebrais passing on horseback.

"I imagine that this must be the captain of the marauders," added Cornelius.

CHAPTER XX.

DICE AND CARDS.

Monsieur de Villebrais had scarcely entered the camp when the noise of his arrival spread. The staffs of the divers regiments which composed the army were stirred up by it, and several officers who were acquainted with his conduct in respect to Belle-Rose and the murder of Monsieur d'Assonville, loudly expressed their indignation. So much audacity astonished them. But Monsieur de Villebrais was not a man to grow frightened at these rumors, and knowing himself supported at court by a relative who had some credit, he thought he could brave with impunity the opinion of his fellows. He was one of those men—and the number of them is greater than one would think—who have a cowardly heart and a bold mind. The evening, then, of his arrival, he went in uniform to an inn where the officers who were not on duty gathered together to talk, drink, and play games. A numerous company was assembled there when he entered. Belle-Rose, introduced by Monsieur de Naucrais, received everywhere a welcome which proved at the same time the esteem which was entertained for his person and for that of the colonel. Monsieur de Villebrais passed between the group without appearing to see his rival, and advancing toward a table where seven or eight officers were playing lansquenet, he threw some gold pieces upon the board. The man who held the cards raised his eyes and recognized Monsieur de Villebrais. He was an old captain of artillery who was known throughout the regiment for his bravery.

"I stake ten louis," said Monsieur de Villebrais.

"Messieurs, I stake nothing," rejoined the captain, and throwing the cards upon the table, he withdrew.

"Monsieur!" exclaimed the lieutenant, drunk with anger and his hand upon the guard of his sword.

The old captain stopped a minute, eyed Monsieur de Villebrais from head to foot, with a scornful smile, and passed on without making any reply. A young musketeer picked up the cards and shuffled them.

"Play, messieurs," said he.

But, before drawing a card, he pushed back the gold pieces of Monsieur de Villebrais, and taking with affectation the glove which had touched them, he threw it into

one corner. Monsieur de Villebrais bit his lips till the blood came.

"It is an insult which you will answer to me for," said he, in a hollow voice.

The musketeer rose and looked at Monsieur de Villebrais as the old captain had done.

"Decidedly," said he, turning to his comrades, "this table is placed in a dirty place; one comes in contact here with disgusting things. Let us go away."

A red cloud passed before Monsieur de Villebrais' eyes. In his blind fury, he wished to seize one of the officers by the arm. This man—a cornet in the light-horse—repulsed him and very gravely went to work to dust the sleeve of his coat. The impulse was given. Every one felt bound to act like the captain of artillery, whose loyalty and honesty were proverbial.

"I am one who wishes to fight you all, cowards!" cried Monsieur de Villebrais.

A shiver traversed the circle of officers, but a captain of grenadiers intervened.

"I believe it would be proper to have the gentleman caned," said he, designating the pale victim; "the valets of the inn would serve us in this respect; what do you think of it?"

"Yes! yes!" replied several voices; "call the valets."

"Stop!" said a lieutenant of cannoneers; "they are honest fellows who might be compromised by it. Lackeys against a bandit—it is unjust. Let us leave the place."

The circle of officers was broken and each one made for the door. Belle-Rose had been a mute witness of this horrible scene. As he passed before his ancient lieutenant, Monsieur de Villebrais recognized him.

"Oh!" he exclaimed, with a transport of rage, "you, at least, will kill me."

And he drew his sword.

Belle-Rose was already placing his hand upon the guard of his, when Monsieur de Naucrais seized him by the arm.

"Monsieur Grinedal," he said to him, in a quick tone of voice, "His majesty has not given you an officer's sword for you to soil it."

Belle-Rose's sword, half drawn, was returned to its scabbard, and all the officers walked slowly out. Monsieur de Villebrais, left alone, tottered; the sword escaped from his nerveless hands, an icy sweat bathed his forehead, and he fell upon the carpet. An hour after this scene Sergeant Déroute entered the inn with the air of a man who has a

delicate mission to discharge. At the first glance he perceived Monsieur de Villebrais seated upon a chair, his elbows supported upon a table, and his head between his hands, pale, mournful, and dejected. His sword was still upon the floor.

Déroute made three steps forward, and, taking off his hat, gave a slight bow.

"Monsieur de Villebrais?" said he.

Monsieur de Villebrais trembled like a man violently drawn from a profound sleep. He raised his head and recognized Déroute.

"Oh!" said he, "it is a challenge you bring me?"

"No, monsieur, it is an order."

"An order!"

"And it is I whom the officers of the regiment have chosen for signifying it to you."

"You! insolent fellow!"

And Monsieur de Villebrais, in a fit of wild anger, grabbed his sword by the blade and raised the heavy guard over Déroute's head; but Déroute, throwing himself back, took from his belt a pistol whose muzzle he turned toward Monsieur de Villebrais.

"Let us act fair, monsieur," he said to him, with that good-natured air of his; "you are no longer my officer. I swear to you, then, that if you make a step forward, if you touch me, I shall blow out your brains."

Monsieur de Villebrais threw his sword against the wall of the room with so much violence that the blade was shivered to pieces.

"Monsieur," said the sergeant, replacing the pistol in his belt, "you are warned by the officers of the regiment in which you served as lieutenant, that if you have the audacity to present yourself to-morrow at the quarters or the parade, they will be constrained to punish you with the flat of their swords, in the presence of the whole army. Consequently you are requested to leave at once, unless it pleases you to submit to this treatment, and to be afterward delivered to the provost, under the accusation of assassination. I have spoken."

Déroute picked up his hat and went out. Monsieur de Villebrais did not move. He was like a man struck by a thunderbolt. Thus the cup of humiliation and of shame had been emptied upon his head, even to the last drop. He remained silent for an hour, then stood up paler than a corpse and with lightning in his eyes. He pulled off his epaulettes and threw them away, cut with a knife the

golden fleurs-de-lis sewed to his coat, tore the white cockade attached to his hat, and trampled it under his feet, picked up, at the foot of the wall where it was lying, the guard of his broken sword, slipped the stump of it in his scabbard, and went away. An hour after a man on horseback left the camp. When he had reached a certain distance, he stopped his horse upon a slight elevation and turned in the direction of the lines which he had just abandoned. A thousand flames shone in space, where the cries of the sentinels echoed unceasingly. Monsieur de Villebrais—for it was he—contemplated the warlike city where floated the flag of France. His arms were raised to heaven, whose terrible maledictions he seemed to be appealing for. "Vengeance!" said he, and urging on his horse toward the Belgian frontier, he disappeared in the shadows. Three leagues in front sparkled the first fires of the enemy's lines. Halted by the Spanish sentinels, Monsieur de Villebrais asked the officer who commanded the post to conduct him to the general. A moment after Monsieur de Villebrais, guided by the officer himself, arrived at the tent of the Duke of Castel-Rodrigo, who governed Belgium for the King of Spain. The duke was seated before a table loaded with maps and plans. Some aides-de-camp, booted and spurred, were sleeping in the corners of the tent.

"What is it now?" exclaimed the duke, at the noise made by the sentinels in presenting arms.

"I bring you a stranger, my general, who desires to speak to you," replied the officer.

The duke looked at Monsieur de Villebrais.

"You are a Frenchman, monsieur," he said to him.

"Yes, general."

"Whence come you?"

"From over yonder," said the lieutenant, pointing in the direction of the French camp.

"From the French camp?" exclaimed the duke.

"Yes, general."

"And what do you want?"

"I come to offer you my sword and my arm."

"Ah!" said the duke, with a gesture in which there was as much surprise as scorn. "That is to say," he resumed, after a short silence, "that you come as a deserter?"

"I come as a man who wishes to avenge himself."

"Very well, monsieur. Then you have a grave insult to punish?"

"Look!" exclaimed Monsieur de Villebrais, drawing the

stump of his sword from the scabbard; "I have broken this sword, but I will fasten another blade to this guard, and I will strike those who have struck me."

"Then we can count upon you if we welcome you?"

"You can count upon me if you accord me what I ask."

"What is it you desire?"

"Some determined men and the right to lead them wherever I wish, day and night."

"You shall have them."

"Then I am yours."

The Duke of Castel-Rodrigo took up a pen from the table, wrote some words, and handed the paper to the lieutenant.

"Here is the order, monsieur; now answer, but think of what you say, for as sure as you deceive me, I shall have you hung."

"Then I have nothing to fear; speak."

"Has Louis XIV. arrived at Charleroi?"

"He will reach the camp to-morrow."

"Does he intend to quit the banks of the Sambre and push on farther?"

"It is believed that the army will abandon its encampment and invade the Spanish possessions, which it has orders to conquer."

"We have Douai, Mons, Tournay, Maubeuge, and Quesnoy."

"These places will hold out three days and will be taken."

"Monsieur," said the duke, "do you forget that you speak to the governor of the province?"

"I forget nothing; you question me, I answer."

"If you believe so strongly in the success of the French arms, what, then, do you come to seek among us?"

"I have told you—vengeance."

"'Tis well, monsieur, withdraw; when I need your services, you shall be informed of it."

When they had gone out, Monsieur de Villebrais turned to the officer who accompanied him.

"Have you, monsieur," he said to him, "in some regiment of the army, any of those men who recoil before no undertaking and know how to risk all in the hope of honest gain?"

"Unfortunately we have too many of those kind of men. You seek soldiers, you will find bandits."

"Will you, monsieur, conduct me to the quarters of those men?"

"It is there, behind that clump of sycamores. They serve in the Duke of Ascot's corps."

The officer hastened on.

"Look, monsieur," said he, stopping behind the sycamores, and with his finger he pointed out to him a line of tents where, in spite of the advanced hour of the night, was to be heard a confused noise of songs and cries.

Around some tents, lit up by candles stuck in the ends of guns, were to be seen a great number of soldiers who were playing dice upon the skin of their drums; others were sleeping here and there, others were drinking, and still others were quarreling. The empty bottles were being smashed, the gamblers were swearing; the most irascible sustained their opinion pistol in hand, the women went and came, stopping at the places where the money was circulating; in one corner there was a soldier gasping for breath, and near him two others who were emptying his purse.

"There are men here from every country," said the officer to Monsieur de Villebrais; "not one of them but what has deserted at least five times; I imagine that they will readily take to you."

Monsieur de Villebrais threw a cold glance at the Spaniard.

"I shall see whether they do or not," said he, and he advanced toward the first group.

Five or six soldiers squatting upon the ground were shaking an old dice-box blackened by use; the dice sounded as they rolled upon the drum.

One of them, who had lost, was twisting his mustache with one hand and fumbling in his pocket with the other.

"Here are five ducats," said the man who had won, "who wishes them?"

"I will give my saber for five ducats," said the one who had lost, and, unclasping his belt, he threw it upon the drum.

"Your saber! it is scarcely worth two; the blade is of iron and the handle of copper."

"Well, here are my pistols," said the soldier; "pistols which have killed ten Catholics and ten Huguenots."

Monsieur de Villebrais' hand was placed upon the shoulder of the bettor.

"I take the saber for ten ducats, and I give ten more for the arm which holds it," said he.

"Agreed!" exclaimed the soldier, on seeing the money shine upon the drum. "Eh! Conrad! play, will you?"

Conrad threw the dice and lost; at the third throw he no longer had anything.

"My officer," said he to Monsieur de Villebrais, who was watching them with arms crossed upon his breast, "I also have a saber and a hand—do you wish them?"

"Here are twenty ducats."

"Bargain concluded," said Conrad, slipping the money into his pockets.

"Conrad," brusquely exclaimed a new-comer wearing the hussars' uniform, "Jeanne has taken a fancy for a necklace to go with her gold cross; I have nothing except my horse left—do you want it?"

"I take the horse and give it to you," said Monsieur de Villebrais.

"You give me the money and the horse?" said the hussar, counting his gold-pieces.

"I give them to you, but on one condition."

"Only one?"

"That is all; the horse and man will follow me everywhere I go."

"They are ready."

At the end of a quarter of an hour Monsieur de Villebrais had recruited his band. There was in the little troop which Monsieur de Villebrais conducted to the lodging assigned him a Lorraine, two Walloons, a native of Franc-Comtois, a Piedmontese, two Swiss, two Dutchmen, and a Bavarian. He ranged his new acolytes around him and examined them attentively.

"You have," he said to them a moment after, "as wages half a pistole per day and a whole one on days when there is an expedition."

"Bravo!" said the Piedmontese.

"Night service will receive double pay."

"Good," said the native of Franc-Comtois, "I will sleep during the day."

"At the first word 'tis necessary to be ready; at the first sign 'tis necessary to leave; at the first order 'tis necessary to kill."

"If it is the order, it is done," said the Bavarian.

"Go, now; you, Conrad, remain."

The troop disappeared, and Conrad sat down in one corner, while Monsieur de Villebrais fumbled in his valise.

"Listen," said the lieutenant, who had just drawn a paper from the valise, "and keep well in mind what I am going to say to you."

"I am listening," said the Lorraine.

"You will leave at daybreak for the French camp. It is your business to enter it."

"I will enter it."

"You will learn the quarters of the artillery and go there at once. It will be easy to discover the lodging of a lieutenant named Grinedal; he is known to the soldiers as Belle-Rose."

"I will find him."

"You will hand him this letter. It is, as you can see, inclosed in an envelope and bearing no address; this letter has been written by a woman. You will say to Belle-Rose that the person who handed you this letter is waiting for him two leagues from camp, behind Morlanwelz, near a wood which you possibly know."

"I know it. It is a marvelous place for ambuscades."

"That is what I thought yesterday as I rode by it. You will so arrange it that Lieutenant Grinedal shall follow you into this wood."

"He will follow me."

"In that case you shall have twenty louis."

"They are earned."

"Very well. One word. If you *let* yourself be suspected, you are as good as hung."

"My mother, who was something of a sorceress, always predicted that I should die in the water. You see that I have nothing to fear."

"Go, then. Here is the letter."

"Is that all?"

"All; the rest concerns me."

"The whole army is on its feet; when everybody looks, no one sees," said Conrad, and he took his way at a deliberate pace toward the camp.

Just as he crossed the palisades on the side of the frontier, His Majesty Louis XIV. entered the camp on the side of Charleroi.

CHAPTER XXI.

GOOD AND EVIL.

It was toward the end of the month of May. Louis XIV., accompanied by his staff, came to take supreme command of the troops gathered together in Flanders. He wished to see, and still more he wished to be seen. His entire

household had followed him, the companies of the gardes du corps and the musketeers, and there was not a single gentleman in France who had not held it an honor to combat under his eyes. All the sons of the best houses who had no rank in the army had come as volunteers, and there was everywhere a stream of magnificient cavaliers who ardently prayed for battle. The king's entrance in the camp was saluted by a thousand acclamations. The soldiers carried their hats at the ends of their guns, and the cry of "*Vive le roi!*" rolled like thunder from Pandelon to Massenal. All the regiments were under arms, and a thousand streamers floated over the tents. When the king approached the Châtelet, where the artillery was garrisoned, Belle-Rose felt his beart beat rapidly. He had never seen the king, and the king, at this epoch, was everything. He was God upon the throne of France. Every favor emanated from him, and his great renown formed for him a dazzling aureole. He was master of peace and war; Holland, like a victim, bowed to his anger, shivered at every step he made; Spain was bleeding from the wounds he had given her; Germany was frightened at his ambition. He was in the midst of Europe like a torch or a pharos, splendid in repose, terrible in agitation. Master of himself as well as of others, Louis XIV. had in addition that royal air which commanded at the same time fear and respect. To see him was to feel that this was the sovereign. When Belle-Rose discovered above the white-plumed heads the hat of the king, he could not refrain, in spite of the orders, from rushing forward. Behind Louis XIV. thronged the flower of the nobility of France; in the first ranks were to be seen the most famous captains of the epoch, and the gentlemen most illustrious by their birth or their merit. The king rode slowly; he had that imposing, somewhat haughty aspect, which the portraits of Mignard and Vauder-Meulen have given him; he saluted the flags of the regiments which were arched above him and answered by a sign of the hand the cries of enthusiasm which his presence excited. Dazzled by that sparkling cortege, Belle-Rose brandished his sword and cried, in a thundering voice, "*Vive le roi!*" At this cry, which came from the heart, at the sight of that loyal and radiant visage, Louis XIV. smiled and saluted the enthusiastic soldier. When Belle-Rose raised his head, Louis XIV. had passed on. Three hours after, the king, accompanied by the principal officers of the army, took his way toward a chapel situated at Marchionnes-au-Pont. All

the governors of the neighboring places had come to the camp; his cortege was increased by their suite, in which was to be remarked a goodly number of dames belonging to the nobility of Trois-Evèches, Picardy, and Artois. Their presence gave more éclat to these military *fêtes*, and mixed the fascination of gallantry with this warlike attire. Monsieur de Naucrais' regiment had been designated to line the road conjointly with the king's household and the Crussol regiments. Belle-Rose was in his rank. Behind the king, among the women of the court, one was the center of attraction.

"How beautiful she is!" said a cornet of the Crussol regiment, leaning forward to see her better.

"Vrai Dieu!" said another officer, "for that woman I would give my life and my mistress."

"That woman?" added a third; "say, rather, that goddess."

Belle-Rose, in his turn, looked in the direction of the ladies; a flash seemed to pass before his dazzled eyes; his heart ceased to beat, and he became as pale as a corpse.

Madame de Châteaufort, proud and superb as Diana the Huntress, walked in the middle of the group. She still possessed that splendid beauty which gave her the aspect of a queen. Her sparkling eyes and her scornful lips attracted and repulsed admiration. Nevertheless an indefinable vail of melancholy softened the somewhat haughty expression of her countenance. At this moment she raised her eyes; Belle-Rose was standing before her. The red lips of Genevieve grew white, her long eyelashes were lowered. But twenty rivals were observing her; she raised her purer than marble forehead and passed on. Belle-Rose was still palpitating under that humid glance, when another shock came to move his heart. Suzanne came behind Genevieve. The young officer wished to run to her, but an invincible force held him back; Suzanne seemed not to have seen him, and nevertheless her lips trembled; her profile had lost nothing of its angelic purity, but she was pale and resigned like the daughter of Jeptha. Madame d'Albergotti carried a flower in her hand; in bending her forehead she touched it with her lips, and the rose fell. She wished to stoop to pick it up, but she encountered the glance of Belle-Rose and hesitated; she made one step, then two, and moved away. A second after, the flower had faded under the kisses of Belle-Rose. Rapid though this movement had been, it did not escape Madame de Châteaufort; she saw it, looked at the woman who was

passing with bowed head, and her heart told her that it was the mysterious Suzanne whose name had so often made her tremble at the bedside of Belle-Rose. The presence of Suzanne at the camp was explained by the nomination of Monsieur d'Albergotti to the governorship of Charleroi. As to Genevieve, she had followed her husband, whom a court intrigue had some time since stripped of his governorship, and who had hastened to learn the cause of his recall. After the mass and prayers offered to the God of armies, the king withdrew to his apartments; the troops dispersed, and Belle-Rose, who had only one thought and one desire, took his way to the residence of Suzanne. His hand, concealed under his coat, crushed the flower against his breast; it had a penetrating odor which intoxicated him, and its embalmed petals were like hot iron which burned him. Madame d'Albergotti's residence was near Coulé, in a place which might pass for solitary. Only six companies of dragoons were to be seen there. Belle-Rose turned a hedge which defended the approach to the house and pushed open a gate which closed the entrance to the garden. A burst of half-restrained laughter stopped him. The garden seemed deserted like the house; no one was to be seen, but the branches of an elder shook in front of him, and behind the trembling foliage he discovered the fresh and smiling face of a young girl.

"Claudine!" he exclaimed, and his extended arms pushed aside the slight rampart which separated him from his sister.

He had perceived Claudine first; he afterward saw Cornelius.

"Both together," he said to them; "my sister and my brother."

At these words, which united them in the thought of Belle-Rose, Claudine blushed.

"Oh!" said she, with a smile upon her lips and with lowered eyes, "Monsieur O'Brien has scarcely been here two minutes."

"Perhaps your memory is slightly in delay," said Belle-Rose; "but it is a soft error of which happiness alone has the privilege."

Cornelius extended his hand to the young lieutenant.

"I shall no longer quit you," he said to him; "our two kings are allies, and our hands are united. My place is here. A soldier, I shall fight like a soldier."

But Belle-Rose had at this moment all the egotism of love; he also wished a little of that joy which Cornelius

and Claudine were tasting. Like those talismans which light fever in the heart of those who touch them, the rose dropped by Suzanne had irritated his ardor.

"Claudine," said he, quite low, to his sister, "is Madame d'Albergotti here?"

At this name, Claudine's face grew melancholy.

"Yes," said she.

"Can I see her—speak to her?"

"Brother, it is a bad thought; but it shall not be said that I refused you anything on the day you returned to me. Wait here."

And, lighter than a bird, Claudine flew toward the house. Cornelius, with a reserve natural to the people of his nation, had withdrawn to one side. Belle-Rose leaned against a tree and closed his eyes. Claudine returned in about five minutes. She was very pale and held a letter in her hand. On seeing this letter, Belle-Rose lost all hope.

"She does not wish it?" said he.

"Read," replied Claudine, and tendering the letter to her brother, she turned aside her head in order to conceal a tear which moistened her eyes.

Belle-Rose broke the seal and read. He saw as through a cloud.

"I saw you nearly a quarter of an hour ago, my friend," the letter said. "I ran to the door, drawn by an irresistible impulse; an unknown power has riveted me to the threshold. Since I met you on my way to the chapel, I have been like one mad. What prayers I have addressed to God! All my strength has failed, and 'tis then your sister has come to tell me that you were expecting a word which should call you to me! This word, I will acknowledge, my friend, my mouth has pronounced twenty times. And now I hesitate! Oh! I do not even hesitate! No, my friend, you cannot, you must not see me again. You have the noise of war to aid you to forget; I have nothing except prayers. Do you wish to take from me the only exile in which my soul can still take refuge? Make a step, come, and I am without defense, and when you leave me, happy to have seen me again, I shall die.

SUZANNE."

On reading this Belle-Rose's heart was broken; he pressed the letter to his lips and recoiled.

"So frail of body and so strong of soul!" he murmured.

Claudine passed her arms around her brother's neck.

"Come," she said to him, "come."

As they were crossing the garden gate, a superior officer presented himself before them. He was a man already old, but who appeared still more so on account of his

slightly stooping form and the difficulty which he experienced in walking.

"Good-day, my child," he said to Claudine, with a kindly air, and he saluted the two young people.

But in passing before Belle-Rose, he looked at him with so singular an expression, that the latter could not refrain from lowering his eyes; it seemed to him that this look searched the depths of his heart and read his most secret thoughts. After a short moment given to this mute observation, the old officer entered the garden. Belle-Rose turned to Claudine as if to question her.

"It is Monsieur d'Albergotti," said she.

And she immediately added, to dissipate a sad preoccupation:

"A great joy is reserved to you, my brother."

"What is it?" said Belle-Rose, whose mind was elsewhere.

"My friend, you are going to see again the honest old falconer whom I have conducted from St. Omer to the camp," said Cornelius.

Belle-Rose embraced Cornelius.

"Guillaume Grinedal and Pierre," said he, "but where are they, then?"

"At the quarters of the artillery."

Belle-Rose ran in that direction, followed at a distance by Claudine and Cornelius. The falconer and his young son were proud to have an officer in the family. They had been waiting for him since morning, and as soon as they saw him each of them extended his arms.

"I bring you a recruit," said the old falconer to Jacques, after the first embraces.

"Pierre, I imagine," said Jacques, smiling at his brother.

"Yes; he also wishes to become an officer of the king."

"Well," said Belle-Rose, "let him take a musket; the musket leads to the sword."

Monsieur de Naucrais had charged Déroute to say to his lieutenant that he could absent himself till night.

"Discipline and family do not go together," he had said; "let him be all to the one to-day so he shall be all to the other to-morrow."

While Belle-Rose, accompanied by his father, Cornelius, Claudine, and Pierre, went to seek a little silence and repose in a neighboring village, the Lorraine was prowling about the camp. After having acquired an exact knowledge of the localities, the Lorraine moved away. Conrad

made his way to a ravine near the camp, where he established himself for the night. He wished to be ready to profit by circumstances. About nine o'clock, Belle-Rose had separated from his father, to whom Claudine had offered lodging in Madame d'Albergotti's house, and made his way back to his quarters. Déroute, who, in spite of his grade, had constituted himself the lieutenant's regular guard, was promenading before the tent.

"My lieutenant," said he to Belle-Rose, "were you expecting some one this evening?"

"No."

"Then some one was undoubtedly expecting you."

"What do you mean?"

"It is very simple. A young man came an hour ago to inquire if you were at home. Upon my negative reply, he asked me if he could wait for you here. 'It is an affair of importance,' he added."

"And how did you answer him?"

"That he was perfectly at liberty to wait for you till to-morrow, if it so pleased him. I had no sooner finished than he was already in your tent."

"In my tent?"

"Where he still is."

Belle-Rose pushed aside the canvas which closed the entrance. At the noise of his arrival the young man, who was seated upon a chest, arose. It was Genevieve de Châteaufort.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE CONFESSION OF A MAGDALEN.

At sight of the duchess, Belle-Rose leaned toward the opening.

"Déroute," said he, "stay here, and no matter who comes, do not let them enter."

"Well!" said the sergeant, and he sat down in the moonlight upon the trunk of a tree, his pike between his knees.

When the curtain had fallen back, Belle-Rose advanced to Madame de Châteaufort, who was trembling all over.

"What do you come to do here, madame, and what do you wish with me?" he said to her, in a voice which he tried to render firm and which trembled.

"I come," said she, "like a culprit before his judge.

Oh!" she said, at the gesture of Belle-Rose, "do not repulse me; if your heart has condemned me, at least hear me."

"And what have you to tell me that I do not already know, madame?"

"The whole truth; I will speak to you as a penitent speaks at the confessional of God. In pity listen to me. It is no longer in the name of your love that I call upon you; it is in the name of justice. Have not the condemned the right to defend themselves?"

Genevieve trembled so strongly that she had to lean against one of the pickets of the tent to keep from falling. The disorder and grief of this woman, once so proud, touched Belle-Rose.

"Speak, then," said he. "I also have a mission to discharge with regard to you, and I will take this opportunity to discharge it."

"First listen to me, and kill me afterward, if it is your will," said Genevieve.

"Take care, madame, it is not a vain threat on my part. You have a terrible account to render, perhaps you are going to force me to avenge a dead man."

"Avenge him? Oh!" said she, "you will not avenge him by killing me."

The expression of the look and voice were so heart-rending, the sense of these words was so clear, that Belle-Rose felt moved to the very bottom of his heart.

"Speak!" he said to her; "speak! you know well, whatever happens, that it is not I who can punish you."

Madame de Châteaufort silently took the hand of Belle-Rose and carried it to her lips. This mute kiss traversed the young officer's veins like a flame. He felt his courage weaken, and disengaging his hand from the clasp of Genevieve, he made her a sign to sit down. Genevieve sat down; her face was as pale and woe-begone as the marble visage of Niobe; her respiration was oppressed, and in spite of the precocious warmth of the season, her teeth chattered.

"Renounce this explanation," Belle-Rose said to her; "I have only one question to address you—only one. Your answer will suffice."

"You shall know nothing, or you shall know all," said the duchess, firmly. "You are my judge and my master; listen to me."

Belle-Rose knew Madame de Châteaufort too well to misunderstand the accent of her voice. Even in the sub-

mission of this woman there was something queen-like which commanded obedience. He was silent and waited.

"I was fifteen," she resumed, "when I saw Monsieur d'Assonville for the first time. The wars of the Fronde were then staining France with blood. I was living with my mother, a Spanish woman allied to the family of the Medinas, in a château near Ecouen."

"I know it," said Belle-Rose.

"One evening as I was walking by myself in the park, I heard the noise of musket-shots in the neighborhood; fear seized me, and I began to run in the direction of the château. All at once, at a turn in the path, an officer presents himself to me; he was pale, frightened, bloody. 'Save me,' he said to me, in a dying voice, and he rolled over at the foot of a tree. A short distance off was to be heard the trampling of a troop of horsemen. I rushed to the little gate of the park; but it was too late—the chief of the band had perceived me.

"'Have you seen an officer?' said he.

"God inspired me with the courage to lie.

"'No,' I resolutely answered, 'I heard the firing and ran up to close the gate.'

"While speaking I felt myself swooning, but my eyes did not quit the chevalier.

"'Then you are not afraid?' said he.

"'Afraid! I am the daughter of Monsieur de La Noue, who is a good gentleman.'

"'Well! he belongs to our party,' said the cavalier, and he plunged into the wood.

"When the troop had disappeared, I shut the gate and returned to the officer, whom I found upon the grass. He was busy stanching the blood which came from his wounds.

"'You have nothing more to fear,' I said to him. 'If you can still walk, lean upon me, and I will aid you to gain a pavilion which is not far from here.'

"The officer arose, and, after many efforts, we reached this pavilion, which was then inhabited.

"Monsieur d'Assonville told me that you saved him," interrupted Belle-Rose

"And did he also tell you that I had loved him?"

Belle-Rose bowed.

"His wounds were numerous, but not at all grave," resumed Madame de Châteaufort. "With the aid of my nurse and her husband, who were devoted to me, I was able to conceal and protect Monsieur d'Assonville. My

father was a Frondeur, and I did not dare to speak to him of this adventure, not having at that time a just idea of this war. Besides, the mystery of our interviews pleased my young imagination, and it was sweet to me to think that I was playing for an unhappy young officer the role of an assisting fairy. My mother, who was of a soft and timid character, and who would have revealed everything to Monsieur de La Noue, of whom she was much afraid, knew nothing of all this affair.

"Monsieur d'Assonville recovered. He was young, spiritual, and handsome; he loved me and I loved him. He was still languishing and weak when I already belonged to him. Which of us was the most guilty—she who, still young and inexperienced, abandoned herself to the love of an unfortunate whom she had saved, or he who, of the innocent young girl, his host, and his protectress, made his mistress?"

"Do not accuse the dead," said Belle-Rose.

"I do not accuse, I relate. Soon, however," continued Madame de Châteaufort, "Monsieur d'Assonville had to go away. The war and the opposing parties in which my father and he served banished every thought of marriage. At times he escaped and came to see me at the pavilion. How many days of gloom were these hours of intoxication to bring! Meanwhile my mother died, and the despair inspired in me by this death revealed to me also that I was a mother."

As Genevieve spoke, two great tears rolled down her cheeks.

"Poor woman!" murmured Belle-Rose.

"Oh, yes! poor woman!" resumed Genevieve, "for what I was then, I no longer am to-day, and what I have become, I would not have been without that shame and that sorrow of my youth! The next day," she continued, "I wrote to Monsieur d'Assonville; my letter remained unanswered; I wrote again, I wrote twenty times; silence and abandonment surrounded me; I believed that he had forgotten me, and had it not been for my child, I would have killed myself. I was then under the care of an aged aunt, my father's sister, rough and severe like him. My nurse alone saw me weep and consoled me. There was then at the château a young Spaniard, related to me on my mother's side, who had obtained a safe-conduct to visit France. My sadness astonished and afflicted him. I soon understood that he loved me; the unhappy have need of affection, and I was profoundly grateful to him for all

the cares with which he surrounded me. Perhaps I was even more attached to him than I let it appear; but my position called for an extreme reserve, and I never let him see how much I was touched by his love. We were often to be seen together in the park. These innocent walks were the cause of his death. One day as I was waiting for him in a path where we were accustomed to meet, he did not come. At dinner I was informed that he had gone away during the morning with a young man. A guard had seen them talking in a lively manner and then go away together. A vague inquietude seized me, and I rose from the table in a state of agitation which I could not subdue. When misfortune touches us with its wing, we have these kind of presentiments. An hour after two woodmen brought back to the château the Spaniard, whom they had found in a corner of the wood, his breast traversed by a sword thrust. There was no longer any hope to save him. When he saw me, he took my hands in his, kissed them, and died. Never shall I forget the expression of his last looks; they were so sad and so full of love, that I began to weep like a madwoman. It seemed to me at that moment that I also loved him and that I was losing with him my last hope."

"And the murderer's name?" said Belle-Rose.

"I found it out later on; as to my poor friend, he died with his secret in his heart and my name upon his lips. Three days after I received a letter from Monsieur d'Assonville; it was dated from Paris and informed me that, having returned from a secret mission to Italy, he was about to leave for England, where he was sent by an order from Cardinal Mazarin. He would not be gone long and begged me to count upon him. It was to be seen that he still loved me, but his language was more grave. Besides, it did not appear that he had received any of my letters.

"This mission, which was to last fifteen days or three weeks, was still unfinished at the end of three months. My father had returned. My days fled like somber dreams, and at night I wept. My thoughts went from Gaston to Don Pedro—that was my cousin's name—and I must acknowledge, my sympathies and my regrets were for him who was no more. He had loved and consoled me; the other had ruined me. It happened one evening that Monsieur d'Assonville's name was pronounced by a gentleman who was visiting us. At this name, my father flew into an unexpected rage, and I learned that Monsieur de La Noue had been beaten and wounded in an encounter with

Gaston's father. Monsieur de La Noue had been humiliated in his pride as a soldier; the wound was incurable. My future grew more and more dark; I did not wish to think of it and dream of it constantly; I had hours of wild gayety and days of mournful despair. Grief consumed my heart. Meanwhile, the Court and Parliament had concluded their alliance, and my father informed me that he had resolved to marry me to a rich lord of the king's party, and that I must hold myself in readiness. He told me this as he was about to leave. When I recovered from my surprise, Monsieur de La Noue was galloping a quarter of a league away. Meanwhile, Monsieur d'Assonville informed me of his return, and the same night I saw him again in the little pavilion. On learning that I was going to be a mother, he exhibited a joy so keen that my tenderness was reawakened. He kissed my hands and wept with intoxication at my knees.

"'Then you still love me?' he said to me.

"'Yes,' I answered, and I meant it at the time.

"'And during this long absence which duty has imposed upon me, has no one come to trouble your heart?' he added.

"'What do you mean?' I asked. 'Have I not always been alone? For a moment I had with me a friend, a brother; he has always been kind, tender, affectionate; he consoled me, and he is dead.'

"'Will you pardon me, Genevieve?' Gaston suddenly said to me.

"I looked at him, frightened already at the sound of his voice.

"'This friend—'tis I who killed him!' said he.

"I uttered a terrible cry at this avowal, and I jerked my hands away from those of Monsieur d'Assonville; it seemed to me that I saw blood upon them.

"'Do not curse me, Genevieve,' he said to me; 'I loved you, I was jealous. When I came back from Italy, at the first inn at which I stopped in Ecouen, your name was pronounced along with that of Don Pedro. It was said that you loved each other. I became mad, and the first person whom I met in the park was he. We were young and both of us armed; you know the rest. I left without seeing you. Alas! I accused you, and you were a mother!'

"He talked a long time, but I did not hear him. A confused noise filled my ears, my heart was wrenched and I fainted. When I came to myself, a child was weeping at my side."

"A child!" repeated Belle-Rose; "it is with it that my mission is concerned."

"Eh!" said Genevieve, "your mission will be easy. What you wish, I wish. A burning fever riveted me to that bed of suffering," she continued; "to that bed where I had for my child only kisses bathed in tears. I do not know how long this delirium lasted; my nurse drove every one out of the room; my aunt, steeped in devotion, barely saw me a minute on returning from the chapel of the château. I was convalescent when my father returned.

"'I bring you a husband, the seigneur of whom I have spoken to you,' he said to me, before having embraced me, and he presented him to me at once."

"It was the Duc de Châteaufort?" said Belle-Rose.

"Yes, Monsieur d'Assonville had disappeared since the scene in the pavilion. He had believed in my treason; in my turn I believed in his forgetfulness. After a month of hesitation, I married the duke. Three days after, I saw Monsieur d'Assonville again; left for dead in a combat in which my father had taken part, he had owed his life to the charitable cares of miserable peasants, who had found him upon the field of battle. His grief frightened me; his reproaches, at the same time bitter and passionate, melted my heart. He loved me, but I no longer loved him. We met then in a little house in the Rue Cassette, where I had established my nurse. These meetings were turn by turn sweet and bitter to me; for him they were intoxicating or terrible. This life became intolerable to me. One day I informed him of my desire to break off our relations. He resisted. He offered to carry me away, to quit France, and to go to live at the end of the world with our child. This proposition came too late; I no longer loved him.

"'You refuse,' he said to me; 'well, if I do not have the mother, I shall at least have the child.'

"This threat reached my heart. My child was my life, my refuge, my hope, my joy. Its smiles lit up my despair. When I was tired of living, I embraced it, and I forgot myself.

"'My child!' I exclaimed, and I felt in me all at once that strength and that energy which had so long slept in the heart of the virgin. 'The child belongs to the mother, and you wish to snatch it from me. It shall not be, I swear it!'

"The next day the child had disappeared. Monsieur d'Assonville had not the time to devote to long researches,

the war which had just burst out in Flanders obliged him to leave Paris, and I remained alone. My husband had a high position at court. I was young and beautiful, I wished to forget, I wished to deceive the imagination. I accepted every distraction which offered itself to me. I soon obtained influence and I made use of it. It was not long before I loved or thought I loved. I made of my existence a whirlwind; I had every kind of success, I tasted every kind of pleasure; the women envied me, the men admired me, I was believed to be happy, and I was only mad. How many times have I not wept the whole night in my oratory, like a Magdalen at the feet of Christ! And then the next day there were *fêtes* and follies.

"Oh, my God!" said Genevieve, sobbing, "I tell you all, Jacques, and you will hate me, perhaps despise me. I curse that time of errors. If my blood could efface them, I would shed it drop by drop. Can it indeed be that I, the daughter of my sainted mother, have traversed such a route? My God! let me believe that you will pardon me; I only ask for a little of that pity which you have for the unfortunate," said the duchess, taking Belle-Rose by the hands, "and though you should curse me, I will always bless you; yes, I will bless you because you have drawn me from that wretched life, because you have given me back love, youth, and faith; because you have made descend into my heart a ray of joy and purity, because I love you!"

Genevieve covered Belle-Rose's hand with tears and kisses. Belle-Rose softly withdrew it.

"Pardon you!" said he; "I am not your judge, and I cannot hate you."

Genevieve raised her arms to heaven.

"Thanks, my God!" said she; "he has not repulsed me."

"You know," she resumed, after a moment's silence, "under what circumstances I met you. You have handed me three letters from Monsieur d'Assonville at the little house in the Rue Cassette; one of these letters entreated; the other implored and threatened at the same time; the last only contained menaces."

"And it is to the last one you have given way?" said Belle-Rose.

"You well know, Jacques," replied the duchess, with an accent of pride, "that fear has no dominion over me. I gave way to this letter, because between the first and the last, I had arranged everything for my interview with

Monsieur d'Assonville, and that at this interview our child was to assist."

"You would have done this, Genevieve?" exclaimed Belle-Rose.

"I was going to do it, when I learned that Monsieur d'Assonville had charged an unknown person to represent him. This discovery made me indignant; I believed that he had revealed our secret, and I resolved to have by cunning, or force if need be, the papers which might compromise me."

"Then you have suspected a gentleman so loyal as Monsieur d'Assonville?"

"Alas! when one is accustomed to practice evil, one quickly forgets belief in the good. But," Genevieve hastened to add, "in having you come to the pavilion, where I received you masked, my intention was only to oblige you to hand over to me the papers which stated the rights of Monsieur d'Assonville; sure then that he could not take my son from me, I would have given way to his affection. I was already tired of that adventurous life in which every distraction was tainted with poison. I saw you, you have saved me, you were young, valiant, generous, and proud. You know how much I loved you at once. I saw through you as one sees through a limpid stream, and your valiant nature gave back to mine a little of its youth and its freshness. Oh! why was I not a young girl then? I would have been worthy of you. Perhaps you would have loved me."

"Genevieve! Genevieve!" exclaimed Belle-Rose agitated by this outburst, "say, did I not love you?"

At this cry a flash of joy illuminated the pale face of Genevieve.

"You have loved me," said she; "is it indeed true? Is it pity which causes you to say so, or is it the impulse of your heart? I have been loved! I have had my part of happiness, and you will not curse me, and you will have at times my name upon your lips! What must I do, say? Your will will be my law; speak, and I obey. But do not banish me from your recollection. Wherever I go, and whatever happens to me, permit me to carry away a word which consoles me and elevates me. Jacques, my friend, your hand! my God! your hand!"

Jacques took Genevieve's head between his hands and kissed her on the forehead.

"You have loved, you have suffered! may God pardon you!" said he.

At this kiss, an unhoped-for joy filled the heart of Genevieve. She threw back her head and wound her feeble arms around Belle-Rose's neck.

"My God! I no longer suffer," said she.

CHAPTER XXIII.

A TRAP.

The next morning, when Belle-Rose opened his eyes, he was alone. For one moment he believed that a feverish dream had troubled his imagination; silence surrounded him, but a vague and sweet perfume with which the air was impregnated recalled to him the fact that Madame de Châteaufort had come to his tent. He arose somewhat troubled, and as he was seeking everywhere, expecting to see her rise from some direction, his gaze fell upon a faded rose whose petals strewed the ground at the foot of the bed. At this sight, the young officer covered his face with his hands.

"Oh, my God!" said he, "yesterday I still loved Suzanne."

His eyes could not quit the poor, abandoned flower whose indiscernible perfumes mounted to his heart like a reproach. He stooped sadly, and picking up the withered petals, he placed them in a medallion, which he wore suspended to his neck.

"Poor leaves!" he murmured, pressing them to his lips, "you are still sweet and fragrant like her from whom you come."

At this instant Sergeant Déroute entered his tent.

"There is a man here asking for you," he said to him.

"Do you know him?"

"No, but it is to you alone that he wishes to speak."

"It is well; let him wait a minute, and I am at his service."

Belle-Rose slipped his sword into his belt, clasped his coat, took up his hat, and went out. The Lorraine was waiting for him before the door.

"What do you want with me?" Belle-Rose said to him.

"I wish to see Jacques Grinedal, lieutenant of artillery in the regiment of La Ferté," replied the rascal, who intended to conscientiously carry out his mission. "Is it indeed to him I have the honor of speaking?"

"Yes."

"If that is the case, my officer, will you acquaint yourself with this letter which I have been charged to hand to you?"

"To me?"

"Certainly."

"But there is no address."

"It does not matter; break the seal and boldly read; the letter is indeed for you."

Belle-Rose tore open the envelope. At the first words he recognized the handwriting of the Duchess de Châteaufort. The note only contained two lines.

"Follow this man ; I must see you on an affair of importance which interests me and which interests you. Make haste ; I am waiting for you."

Belle-Rose looked turn by turn at the man and the note. The man sustained this look without winking; as to the note, its laconic character surprised the young officer; but this brevity even persuaded him that it was a question of Monsieur d'Assonville's child.

"Is the person who handed you this letter still in the camp?" asked Belle-Rose.

"No," boldly replied the Lorraine.

"How long has it been since you spoke to her?"

"Almost an hour ago."

"Then you know where to find her?"

"I do."

Belle-Rose called Sergeant Déroute and commanded him to get ready his horse.

"He is ready."

"Go, then, and bring him."

A moment after Déroute came back, leading two horses by the bridle.

"Here are two inseparable animals," said he; "where one goes, the other must follow. My lieutenant will permit the gray to accompany the black?"

"Suit yourself."

Conrad had heard the whole conversation. At these last words, he drew near.

"The person who expects you," said he to Belle-Rose, "has strongly insisted on my bringing you alone."

Déroute brusquely intervened.

"My friend," said he to the Lorraine, "the person who sent you knows that my horse is a surprising animal for friendship. If he was left behind, he would break his

head; it is a murder which you would not wish to have upon your conscience. March; we follow."

Conrad reflected that a longer insistence might awaken suspicion; after all, it was only two men against ten, and so he made ready to leave.

As they were starting out Déroute called to a corporal who was passing by that way.

"Eh, Grippard!" he said to him, "come sit down here and guard the house. If Monsieur de Naucrais or any one else comes to ask for us, assure them that we will return promptly. We go—— Where are we going?" he said, turning in the direction of Conrad.

"To Morlanwelz," said Conrad, who could not avoid answering this question.

"You have heard?" continued Déroute, addressing himself to Grippard.

"Perfectly."

"Sit down, then, and watch well."

At three hundred steps from the camp the Lorraine mounted his horse, which he had left at a farm-house, and they pushed on rapidly in the direction of Morlanwelz. Belle-Rose had not made a league when Madame de Châteaufort, riding horseback, appeared before the lieutenant's tent. She was clothed in a dress of green velvet which set off wonderfully her elegant and supple form; a gray felt hat, ornamented with a red plume, shaded her face, and with the end of her whip she provoked a superb white mare which pranced under her and scattered the foam from its inflamed nostrils. Two lackeys on horseback followed her; each of them had a musket hung to the saddle-bow.

"Hey, friend!" said she to Grippard, "will you say to Lieutenant Belle-Rose that a lady is here who desires to speak to him?"

"I would certainly do so, madame, if the lieutenant had not gone away."

"Gone away, did you say?"

"Half an hour ago."

"Gone away without saying anything?"

"A man came early this morning, handed him a note, and they have gone away together. Sergeant Déroute has charged me to answer that they were going in the direction of Morlanwelz."

"To Morlanwelz? but there are Spaniards in that direction!"

"Spaniards and Imperials," said Grippard.

The eyes of the duchess fell upon a paper folded in the form of a letter which was lying on the ground; nimble as a bird, she leaped to the ground and picked up the paper. At the first line she grew pale.

"This is the note which was handed to the lieutenant?" said she to Grippard, in a trembling voice.

"I think so."

"It is a piece of treachery!" said she.

At this moment Cornelius O'Brien, Guillaume, and Pierre came up to embrace Belle-Rose.

The duchess at once recognized the gentleman whom she had met in the antechamber of Monsieur de Louvois. She ran to him.

"Monsieur," she said to him, "do you recognize me?"

"The Duchess de Châteaufort!" exclaimed Cornelius, bowing.

"Well, monsieur, at this moment Belle-Rose is being assassinated."

At this cry, old Guillaume rushed toward the duchess.

"What did you say, madame?" he exclaimed; "I am his father."

"I say that we must save him if he is living or avenge him if he is dead. It is to Morlanwelz we must go; to horse, to horse, and follow me!"

The duchess took a pistol from Grippard's belt, leaped upon her mare, and rode away, followed by the two lackeys. Cornelius, Guillaume, Pierre, and Grippard mounted some cavalry horses which were close by, and the little troop, excited by its guide, crossed the barriers of the camp.

Meanwhile Belle-Rose and Déroute were following the Lorraine, who urged on his steed without saying a word. At the end of a league, Conrad took a path to the left which cut through the fields. The approach of war had caused the inhabitants to decamp; the farms were devastated; not a peasant was to be seen in the neighborhood.

"Where the devil are you taking us?" said Déroute to the Lorraine.

"It is an interview in which prudence is necessary. The person who sends me would be in despair if she was suspected," replied Conrad.

Déroute was silent, but he assured himself that his pistols were loose in their holsters. Those which Conrad concealed in his pockets were all loaded. They kept on for half an hour without discovering any one. Belle-Rose, absorbed by his thoughts, was meditating on the mission

which he was going to accomplish. The road followed by the three cavaliers crossed a small wooded valley. At the extremity of the valley a château was to be seen.

"This is the place," said Conrad, pointing out the château with his finger.

As they were passing along a copse Déroute heard a noise of troubled underbrush. Conrad quickly turned his head.

"Some boar is leaving its lair," he smilingly said.

Déroute slipped his right hand under his holsters, seized the butt-end of a pistol, and leaning toward Belle-Rose, whispered in his ear:

"Take care, my lieutenant; we are in the enemy's country."

Belle-Rose paused and looked quickly around him. All at once the hoofs of a horse were heard striking a pebble.

"Oh! oh!" said Déroute, "here is a horse whose feet are shod."

The Lorraine suddenly raised his hand and fired a pistol at the sergeant; but the sergeant had his eye upon him; throwing himself upon the horse's neck, he answered the Lorraine's movement by a similar one, and the two shots were fired almost at the same time. The Lorraine's ball passed over the sergeant's head.

"Ah! my friend!" exclaimed Déroute, returning ball for ball, "you are too awkward for the trade you carry on."

The sergeant's shot went through the Lorraine's arm and struck his horse's head. The wounded animal neighed with pain, reared itself, and left like an arrow. At the end of a hundred steps it entered a morass whose green water was covered with grass; at the first bound he sank up to his quarters in the mire; a violent dig of the spur caused him to rise; he plunged forward, got involved in the mud and rolled over in the water. For one moment the horse's legs were seen to beat the surface of the morass in the convulsions of agony; the hands of Conrad were stiffened as they clung to the saddle; a furious bound brought his head above the bed of grass which was stifling him. "Come to me!" he cried, in a panting voice; but the horse sank down, and the Lorraine disappeared under the water. All this scene had transpired in a minute; just as the two pistol-shots were fired, a troop of cavaliers appeared upon the edge of the wood. At their head rode Monsieur de Villebrais. Déroute looked behind him; three or four men were guarding the path; decidedly

Belle-Rose and he were cornered. On the side opposite to the wood was a large rock. Belle-Rose urged on his horse toward it, and sure of not being hemmed in, he faced the enemy. Déroute was already at his side, sword and pistol in hand. Monsieur de Villebrais rallied his troop and advanced toward the rock. There were a dozen cavaliers behind him ranged in a semi-circle. He rode slowly, like a man who only fears that his prey may escape him.

"Yesterday it was your turn; to-day it is mine," he cried to Belle-Rose; "I take my revenge."

"You steal it!" replied Belle-Rose, who prepared to sell his life dearly.

"Agreed!" said Monsieur de Villebrais; "I will not cavil about terms. I have it; the rest matters little to me."

As he was speaking, there was heard the distant noise of a gallop rolling like thunder over the path. Belle-Rose and Monsieur de Villebrais looked in the direction from which the noise came. A troop of cavaliers was coming up at headlong speed, guided by a woman riding a white horse. Monsieur de Villebrais recognized Madame de Châteaufort. He paled and drew his sword.

"We take these," he exclaimed, pointing out Belle-Rose and Déroute; "you take those," he said, addressing himself to a scarred soldier who appeared to be the lieutenant of the band, "Burk; gallop."

Two-thirds of the troop followed Burk, who rode, saber in hand, toward the path. The rest followed Monsieur de Villebrais. But Belle-Rose and Déroute spared him three-fourths of the way. On seeing them immovable for a moment at sight of the cavaliers who were coming at frightful speed, Déroute had leaned toward Belle-Rose.

"Let us charge these rascals!" he said to him.

Belle-Rose and Déroute fell like a thunderbolt upon the band of Monsieur de Villebrais just as Burk's troop and that of Madame de Châteaufort came together. The shock was terrible on both sides. Burk, who was at the head, seized Madame de Châteaufort by the arm as she was riding toward Belle-Rose.

"Eh!" said he, "eyes like diamonds and gold around the neck! a double wind-fall!"

"You touched me, I believe," said Madame de Châteaufort, proudly.

And raising her pistol, she blew out the soldier's brains. It was the signal of combat. Twenty detonations followed it and the swords clashed. At the first discharge, one of

the lackeys was killed and Cornelius dismounted. The superiority of numbers was on the side of the assailants. Madame de Châteaufort wrung her hands in despair. Upon the ground where Belle-Rose was fighting, she no longer saw anything except a group of men surrounded by smoke where shone the glitter of swords. Her frightened eyes were turning to heaven, when at the turn of the wood she perceived a company of cavaliers who were approaching at a walk. Genevieve whipped her mare and hastened toward them.

CHAPTER XXIV.

A SOUL IN PAIN.

Those who rode at the head of this company were magnificently dressed. In a second Genevieve was before them. She was quivering with anger and terror; the blood of the man whom she had killed had spurted out upon her dress, and her hand still held the smoking pistol.

"There is a French officer here who is being assassinated, messieurs," she said to them. "Friends or enemies, if you are gentlemen, you will save him."

The one who seemed the chief of the band made a sign of the hand, an officer rode away at a gallop with the soldiers of the escort, and Madame de Châteaufort followed him. It was time for this reinforcement to intervene. Déroute was wounded and extended on the ground, his leg under his horse. Belle-Rose, also dismounted, was defending himself with the stump of his sword whose blade had remained in the body of a cavalier; his clothes were perforated in twenty places and reddened in three or four. Of the two lackeys, one was dead the other had his head split open. Cornelius and Pierre were struggling in the midst of three or four bandits infuriated against them. Old Guillaume was lying upon a soldier whom he had killed just as the soldier was going to strike Belle-Rose. Grippard was finishing poniarding a Swiss whom he had overcome. Old Guillaume was the only one who had succeeded in breaking through the troop of Burk. The father had come to die near the son. The officer's hussars surrounded the combatants and forced them to quit fighting. All were bruised and Monsieur de Villebrais' face was covered with blood. At sight of the officer who caused the swords to be returned to their scabbards, he grew pale

with rage and threw his own upon the blood-stained grass. The Duchess de Châteaufort rushed to Belle-Rose.

"Living," said she, "living, my God!"

And she fell upon her knees. Prayer half parted her lips, and two great tears rolled over her cheeks. Belle-Rose raised her in his arms with passionate ardor.

"So," said he, "you will always save me. This makes three times I owe my life to you."

Genevieve, overwhelmed by so many terrible emotions, leaned her head upon Belle-Rose's shoulder and burst into tears.

"Oh, my God!" said she, "I would like to die thus."

At this moment the Duke of Castel-Rodrigo—for it was he whom Genevieve had met—arrived upon the scene of combat.

"Ah! 'tis you, monsieur?" said he, addressing himself to Monsieur de Villebrais, whom he recognized in spite of the disorder of his clothes and the blood with which he was covered.

"Yes," said Monsieur de Villebrais, who bit his lips with anger.

"Diable! monsieur, you have not delayed entering on the campaign, from what I see," said the duke, in a tone of scorn.

"I imagine, monsieur le duc," boldly replied the traitor, "that you have not confided these brave men to me for leading them to mass."

The Duke of Castel-Rodrigo frowned.

"Besides," added Monsieur de Villebrais, "it is sweet to me to know that we live in the time of chivalry. In the future, when I have an enemy to fight, I shall take great care to warn him of the time and the place, as did the valiant knights of the round table."

"Monsieur well knows that he lies," coldly said an officer belonging to the suite of the Duke of Castel-Rodrigo; "he is not ignorant of the fact that in the time of which he speaks deserters were bastinadoed and traitors hung."

This officer, who possessed an austere and pensive countenance, was the young Prince of Orange—the same who was to be one day William II., King of England.

"Enough, messieurs!" exclaimed the duke; "I have given Monsieur de Villebrais permission to be accompanied by ten or twelve soldiers everywhere he chose to go; but I have not, that I know, abdicated my rights as

governor of the province. Your role is finished, monsieur, mine begins. Go!"

Monsieur de Villebrais slowly withdrew. In passing before Madame de Châteaufort and Belle-Rose, he threw them a look stamped with an implacable hatred, rallied those of his men who were still unwounded, and moved away.

"Monsieur," said the duke to Belle-Rose, "you are free; here are horses for yourself and your friends; here is an escort for protecting you. There are no longer here either Frenchmen or Spaniards; there are only gentlemen."

Belle-Rose had scarcely thanked the duke, when a feeble sigh made him turn his head. His blood had congealed in his veins; he looked everywhere fearing to see. A dying man half extended upon a dead body stretched toward him his suppliant arms.

"My father!" exclaimed Belle-Rose, and he rushed toward him.

Cornelius and Pierre were kneeling beside the falconer. A deathly pallor had effaced from their countenances the animation of combat.

"I have lived more than seventy years," Guillaume said to them; "God has done me the favor to let me die like a soldier; do not weep."

Belle-Rose did not weep, but his face was frightful to behold; he sustained his father's head in his hands and kissed his white hair.

"It is for me that you are dying," he said. "And Claudine and Pierre—but you should have let me be killed."

His trembling fingers parted the cloth which concealed the wound; the iron had entered the breast, from which came a small stream of blood; the wound was deep and horrible. Belle-Rose's features contracted; the elder smiled.

"You speak to me of Claudine and Pierre," he said to him; "I confide them to you."

At this moment the eyes of Belle-Rose met those of Genevieve; he recollected the letter which he had received, the cause which had brought him to Morlanwelz; his eyebrows contracted, and he threw upon the poor woman a look so full of bitterness that she concealed her head between her hands. Meanwhile Cornelius had a litter hastily constructed with branches of trees; a surgeon, who accompanied the Duke of Castel-Rodrigo, bandaged the wound of old Guillaume; two soldiers took up the

litter, and the sad procession took the road to Charleroi. Déroute, who was not dangerously hurt, rode his horse passably well. Madame de Châteaufort dried her eyes reddened by tears and approached Belle-Rose.

"Jacques," she said to him, in a sweet and firm voice, "I have a favor to ask of you, not for myself, but in the name of the child whom you have sworn to watch over."

At this recollection, Belle-Rose was agitated.

"Speak, Genevieve, I am listening to you; but make haste, each minute is precious."

"I must see you, I must speak to you again on the subject of this child. Do you wish it?" fixing a suppliant look upon him who had loved her so much.

"I do," said he.

"Thanks, Jacques. To-morrow I will inform you where we shall have this last interview. Now, adieu."

Madame de Châteaufort turned aside her head to conceal a tear which trembled on the border of her eyelid, urged on her mare and disappeared. Some hours after the encounter in the valley, the funeral cortege entered the camp of Charleroi. Monsieur de Naucrais, forewarned by Grippard, ran to the falconer, who had loved and protected his childhood. In a corner of the tent, Claudine and Pierre were sobbing; Belle-Rose was despondent but firm; Cornelius went from Claudine to Belle-Rose, mournful and silent, Guillaume had the serenity of an old soldier who had always lived like a Christian. He was dying as others go to sleep. Guillaume recognized Monsieur de Naucrais as soon as he entered and pressed his head. He could no longer speak, but his loyal glance had still the brilliancy of his green old age. While he was retaining Monsieur de Naucrais, he made a sign to Belle-Rose to approach; his eyes turned then to the son of Comte d'Assonville with a disturbed and supplicating expression.

"I am his brother," said Monsieur de Naucrais, touched by this mute prayer.

Guillaume carried Monsieur de Naucrais' hand to his lips with so much effusion, that the impassible soldier turned aside his head to conceal his emotion. At this moment a corner of the canvas was raised and gave passage to Monsieur de Luxembourg. The duke approached the bed where the old falconer was lying and gave him his hand.

"Do you recognize me, Guillaume?" he said to him.

Guillaume looked at him a moment, and a soft smile was seen to shine in his eyes.

"You have succored me in time of misfortune," said the duke, "and I have remembered it. Belle-Rose will be as a son to me. I will not spare him dangers, and if God grants us life, he will go further than he has ever dreamed."

The falconer carried the gentleman's hand to his lips. On retiring, the duke gave Belle-Rose's hand a cordial pressure.

"Be firm," he said to him, "a father is still left you."

The almoner of the battalion arrived during the night and recited the prayer of the dying. Everybody knelt down, and Guillaume, with hands joined, committed his soul to Him who loves and pardons. The following day, about noon, a soldier presented himself at Belle-Rose's tent. It was a page with a sly and determined smile. In spite of her man's clothes, only a glance was necessary for Belle-Rose to recognize Camille, Madame de Châteaufort's waiting-woman.

"My mistress informs you," said she, "that she expects you this evening, if you have an hour to spare her."

"I am at her orders," replied Belle-Rose.

"If that is the case, be ready this evening at sunset."

"I will be ready. Where must I go?"

"Between Marchienne and Laudely, almost two leagues from here. But do not trouble yourself, it is I who will serve you as guide."

"Till this evening, then."

Camille turned upon her heels and moved away. Monsieur de Villebrais, still more athirst for vengeance since his last encounter with the Duke of Castel-Rodrigo, had scattered his men and some others whom the allurement of gain had attached to his fortune, around the French lines, recommending to them the strictest surveillance. He himself, under the costume of a market gardener, had ventured even as far as the advance posts; and he went and came continually along the paths like a wolf seeking its prey. About five o'clock, as he was standing on a slight elevation, he perceived Madame de Châteaufort on horseback, followed by a single lackey, and directing her course toward the barriers. Monsieur de Villebrais waited till she was some hundred steps from the camp, and leaping upon a horse which was always in reach of his hand, he made a sign to one of the men to follow him and launched himself in pursuit of the duchess, taking care, however, to keep the river between them to avoid observation. Madame de Châteaufort followed the route to Marchienne-au-Pont. At a quarter of a league from this

town, she took a road to her right, gained the country around Laudely, and stopped at a hundred steps from the banks of the Sambre, before a hunting pavilion whose door was opened to her by a species of guard. Monsieur de Villebrais, not seeing her leave, coasted the banks of the river, found a ford, urged on his horse, and traversed the Sambre. After having hitched his horse to the trunk of an old willow, he softly directed his course toward the pavilion, made the tour of it, and when he had recognized those within, he again took up the route to Charleroi, leaving his acolyte as a sentinel in the underwood. At sunset Monsieur de Villebrais had gathered together four or five of his men, and had given them a rendezvous at Laudely. Each of his followers was to go there alone. As to himself, he lay down in a ditch on the border of the road where Madame de Châteaufort had followed and waited. Meanwhile, at the hour agreed upon, Belle-Rose saw Camille advancing. She was riding a beautiful Spanish genet.

"Are you ready?" the false page said to him.

Belle-Rose's sole reply was to leap upon a horse which Grippard was holding by the bridle. Both of them set out. They had not made a quarter of a league when they heard a cavalier flying at headlong speed over the route. Belle-Rose turned back, and, in the semi-obscurity, he recognized his brother who was only a moment reaching him. Belle-Rose gave him his hand, and all three, leaning over the croup of their horses, passed like phantoms. Monsieur de Villebrais arose, and a bitter smile lit up his countenance.

"If Madame de Châteaufort delivers him to me," said he, "I can well afford to pardon her."

At the end of an hour he saw, among the trees on the other side of the Sambre, a trembling light. Monsieur de Villebrais applied the whip to his horse, and leaning over his horse's mane, he began to search for the ford. He thought he recognized a stone which he had remarked during the evening, and he boldly threw himself into the water.

Meanwhile Camille and Belle-Rose reached the pavilion of Laudely. The guard introduced them into an antechamber, where Camille stopped. Belle-Rose penetrated a second room, in which Madame de Châteaufort was waiting for for him. Pierre had seated himself at the door of the pavilion. Genevieve welcomed Belle-Rose with a sad smile.

"I have made this appointment," she said to him, "to speak to you of a child who no longer has a father and whom its mother wishes to confide to you."

"In communicating to you the mission which Monsieur d'Assonville has charged me," said Belle-Rose, "I have never pretended to deprive you of the right to see and embrace your son. Can we not together watch over him?"

Madame de Chateaufort shook her head.

"Yesterday such a proposition would have delighted me; but to-day——"

The voice of Madame de Châteaufort was so deeply despondent that Belle-Rose took her hand.

"Genevieve," he said to her, "forget that you are a woman by recollecting that you are a mother."

"I can forget nothing," said she. "You wish us to watch together over this child. Alas! can we? When you see him smiling between us, what kind of a look will you have for the mother? Stay, Jacques, yesterday I understood everything. Misfortune pursues me! When Monsieur d'Assonville died, I was there! When your father's blood flowed, I was there! The reproach to me in your looks was also in your heart, and now, whatever you do, the idea of murder will always abide in my memory! Between you and me there are too many misfortunes; there is your father, there is Gaston!"

Belle-Rose lowered his head. Each word of Genevieve was an arrow in his heart.

"You are silent, Jacques," said she, "and I no longer pity myself. You have pardoned me."

As this last word fell from her lips a terrible cry rent the air. Both of them trembled; but this nameless cry had traversed space like a bullet; everything had again become calm and silent. By an instinctive movement, Genevieve had drawn near Belle-Rose.

"Jacques," she said to him, taking one of his hands between hers, "tell me at least that you will teach my son to love me? When he sees me he smiles at me; he has divine caresses for my lips; he extends over my faults his innocence like a cloak; his little hands cling to my neck, and, when he calls me, it seems to me that the benediction of God descends upon me."

Genevieve wept, her face bowed over Belle-Rose's hand.

"He will love you! he will love you! how could Gaston's son fail to love you?" exclaimed Belle-Rose, beside himself.

Another cry more horrible still resounded. It was a

funereal cry which did not seem to belong to earth; it grated upon the ear and chilled the heart; the depths of space swallowed it up, and there was no longer anything to be heard except the soft murmur of the foliage shaken by the wind. The frightened Genevieve knelt down.

"My God!" said she, "is it Gaston's soul calling me?"

Belle-Rose felt a death-like shiver run to the roots of his hair, which was moistened by a cold sweat. He rushed to the window and opened it. The serene night enveloped the country in its transparent obscurity; the breeze sang between the flowery branches of the hawthorns, and in the shadow of a hedge an amorous song-bird was to be heard chattering upon its nest. An invincible terror kept Genevieve kneeling upon the floor; she had the pallor of marble, her head thrown back seemed to still be drinking in the horror of this cry, and her hands twisted the thick curls of her floating hair. Belle-Rose sounded with his eyes the profundity of the night; his hand had strayed to the guard of his sword, and this soldier who knew not fear waited mute and shivering. Another cry, a lugubrious cry, suddenly burst forth and was prolonged under the starry sky; it was at once a heart-rending complaint and a formidable menace, a cry which congealed the blood. Madame de Châteaufort, mad with fright, bounded to the knees of Belle-Rose and clung to them. All at once the door was violently opened, and Pierre rushed into the room, his naked sword in his hand; Camille followed close behind him.

"Do you hear, brother?" said, in a low tone, the pale young man; "do you hear?"

Belle-Rose disengaged himself from Madame de Châteaufort's embrace and drew his sword.

"Come, brother!" said he, and both of them hurriedly left the pavilion.

CHAPTER XXV.

A CITY WON.

Madame de Châteaufort followed Belle-Rose and Pierre. In the state of mortal fright in which her soul was plunged, what she dreaded before everything was to remain alone. The landscape was calm and peaceful. The fields, bathed in a blonde light, were lost in a placid and misty horizon where shone above some sparks immovable

as stars. At a hundred steps from the pavilion, the Sambre flowed like a stream of liquid silver, and nothing was to be heard but the soft noise of the water laving the foot of the willows. It seemed to the two brothers that the cries had come from the direction of the river. They were advancing then in that direction, when a hoarse and breathless cry passed above their heads and caused Madame de Châteaufort to bend like a tree beaten by the wind. A lugubrious silence followed it. Belle-Rose straightened himself up.

"It is the cry of a drowning man," said he, and he rushed toward the bank of the river.

Pierre reached the sand as quickly as he, and both of them searched along the river.

They had not made fifty steps when they perceived, near an old willow, a black body floating softly with the current of the water. There were moments when this body came to the surface, and others when it disappeared under the branches of the willow.

"Behold him?" said Pierre; "his hands are clasped around a branch."

It was in truth the dead body of a man clinging to the tree. Belle-Rose advanced to the trunk of the willow, while Pierre entered the stream; leaning over the dead body, they drew it from the water; but the inflexible fingers were glued to the branch, and it was necessary to cut it in order to push the body to the shore. Madame de Châteaufort was waiting on the bank of the Sambre; when the wet corpse was stretched out upon the grass, in the peaceable rays of the moon, she was the first to recognize it.

"Monsieur de Villebrais!" said she.

Belle-Rose threw himself on his knees near the dead man; it was indeed he; the face was livid, and his eyes seemed projecting from their sockets. The young officer let fall the head which he had raised for a moment.

"The heart no longer beats," said he. "May God have mercy upon his soul."

Monsieur de Villebrais, trusting to pass the Sambre at the ford, had been deceived; his horse, which had at first only sank up to its sides in the water, suddenly lost footing; Monsieur de Villebrais wished to bring it back, but the current was strong and rapid at this place; the officer abandoned the animal and attempted to save himself by swimming. Perhaps he would have succeeded had not the horse in its struggles struck him in the head with its foot,

which caused him to lose half his strength. It was then that the swimmer uttered his first and formidable cry. Monsieur de Villebrais struggled against the current with the energy of despair; his head at times sank under the surface, his mouth filled with water, but when he had enough strength to do so he uttered one of those awful cries which chilled Madame de Châteaufort with affright. A last effort brought him to the old willow undermined by the river, his fingers fastened themselves to a branch like iron bands, and he wished to raise himself up to the trunk; but the branch gave way, a cry of horror burst from his blanched lips, and his face disappeared under the waves.

When Belle-Rose had assured himself that Monsieur de Villebrais was dead, he called the guard and confided to him the body of the drowned man; then he set out with Madame de Châteaufort and Pierre for the pavilion. At this moment the rapid galloping of three or four horses was heard in the distance; they were Monsieur de Villebrais' men, who, seeing themselves deprived of their chief, were regaining their quarters. Madame de Châteaufort found herself a moment after alone with Belle-Rose. The unexpected and terrible death of Monsieur de Villebrais had increased the profound sadness and bitter discouragement with which she had felt herself struck. Desolation was in her soul; she had seen Monsieur d'Assonville's agony; she had just seen the dead body of Monsieur de Villebrais; she saw before her Belle-Rose, pale and mournful, grieving in his heart for his father's death. She understood that the hour of separation had come, and calling to her aid all the strength which was left her, she drew from her pocket a small sealed package.

"Here," said she to Belle-Rose, "are the papers which settle the annuity of Monsieur d'Assonville's son; when he shall be of an age to choose a career, he can do it like a gentleman. To these papers I have added a letter which gives to you every right over him."

"But you, Genevieve?" said Belle-Rose.

"I shall embrace him—it is the only favor which I ask of you."

Having said this, Madame de Châteaufort arose. All hope was banished from her heart. She approached Belle-Rose and extended her hand. Belle-Rose, without making any reply, took it between his.

"So," she resumed, "I shall be your friend, nothing more, nothing less—an absent friend, of whom you will sometimes think without bitterness?"

"A friend whose name I shall cause to be blessed by the lips of a child," replied Belle-Rose.

Genevieve's countenance shone with a pure joy.

"That is a sentiment which I shall carry away in my heart," said she, "and which will console me when I am alone. Adieu, my friend; may you find some day the happiness which I should have wished to give you! It is a new life which I am beginning, and I begin it with repentance."

Belle-Rose held Genevieve to his heart for some minutes, then feeling himself being overcome by tears, he snatched himself from her arms and rushed out of the apartment. A moment later he was riding toward Charleroi, accompanied by Pierre.

Two days after this occurrence the camp was raised, and on June 4th the army set siege to Tournay. Claudine and Suzanne had remained at Charleroi, Monsieur d'Albergotti having just fallen sick. His great age, the fatigues of war, his wounds, all inspired grave inquietude concerning his condition. In the midst of a city filled with soldiers it was to be feared that the old officer might not receive all the care which his situation called for: it was decided that he should be taken to Paris by easy stages; there at least he would have all the aid that science could give him. Madame de Châteaufort withdrew to the city of Arras, where since his disgrace the duke had received orders to reside, the husband having asked his wife to aid him by her presence at the time of the official receptions and entertainments. Pierre, attached to the company in which Belle-Rose served, had followed the army to Tournay. The operations of the siege were actively begun and the place was invested on the same day. The efforts of the artillery were turned against a fort which commanded the place on the south side. The besieged answered by a well maintained fire the attacks of the French Army, and sought to trouble its operations by frequent sorties. But the presence of the king increased the ardor of the troops, and the time was not far distant when the city would be forced to sound a parley. To hasten this moment, it was determined to undermine a bastion, the fall of which, by opening the rampart, would constrain the Governor of Tournay to come to terms. It was an expedition in which there were great dangers to run, and which called for determined men. Belle-Rose, who was seeking an occasion to distinguish himself, readily volunteered.

"It is well," Monsieur de Naucrais said to him; "choose

your men, and if you succeed, you will be a captain."

Toward nightfall Belle-Rose, accompanied by Déroute, Pierre, and four or five sappers, left the sunken road and approached the ditches by crawling over the ground. The first sentinels who perceived him fired upon him; without giving them time to reload their guns, he started running toward the ditch, into which he let himself fall. Belle-Rose had provided himself with a sackful of tow which he had topped with a hat. Just as the Spaniards extended their guns above the rampart he threw this species of manikin into the ditch. It was already dark, and all the soldiers being deceived, they fired at it, with two or three exceptions. Belle-Rose jumped up at once; those who had not fired did so now, but the lieutenant had already reached the other side and had lodged himself behind a pile of rubbish without other accident than a ball lost in his clothes. Bèlle-Rose's men, stretched out in the depressions in the ground, were waiting for his signal to descend. As to Belle-Rose himself, sure of not being disturbed, he immediately began the sapping of the rampart and worked with such ardor that in less than two hours he had contrived an excavation which two men could occupy. The Spaniards kept on firing at him, but the balls flattened themselves against the stone or rebounded behind him; three or four among them had attempted to join the miner by passing over the rampart; but Pierre and Déroute had killed the two first; another, struck in the thigh, had fallen into the ditch, where he had broken his back; the fourth had been shot by Belle-Rose himself just as he was setting foot upon the soil. After these attempts, so badly terminated, the Spaniards prudently remained behind the wall. Belle-Rose whistled softly. At this signal, which had been agreed upon in advance, Déroute and Pierre ran to the border of the ditch. The one stopped the other.

"Eh, friend, I am the sergeant!" said Déroute.

"Eh, comrade, I am his brother," replied Pierre, and he leaped into the ditch.

Pierre joined Belle-Rose in the midst of the musket-shots. A ball scratched him close to the eyebrows. A half an inch deeper, and he would have been killed.

"Eh, brother, they have baptized you," said Belle-Rose on seeing the blood upon the forehead of the young soldier.

Both set to work and pushed the task so vigorously that it was soon necessary to give a second whistle. This time it was Déroute who presented himself. The besieged threw

fire-pots into the ditch; but the sergeant, nimble as a cat, had already disappeared under the sap. The whistles rapidly succeeded each other; the wall was pierced; the miners were still at their post, with the exception of one who had been killed by a shell bursting. This accident had influenced Déroute to raise behind the sap a bank of earth which would shelter them.

"Here we are like moles," said he, with that tranquil air which never abandoned him; "let us dig."

Toward morning they heard a hollow noise like that of a subterranean work going on. Belle-Rose made everybody stop and glued his ear to the sides of the mine.

"Very well," said he; "there is sapping going on in front."

"Mine and counter-mine!" said Déroute; "let us dig."

They dug so well that toward noon they heard very distinctly the blows of the pick striking the earth. On both sides the work was being carried on with equal ardor.

"Quick, my boys!" said the sergeant; "after the shovel it will be the turn of the pistol."

At the end of an hour Belle-Rose recognized by the sound of the blows that they were no longer separated except by two feet of earth.

"Lay down, all!" said he, extending his hand toward his miners.

"Eh, my lieutenant, all, except me!" exclaimed Déroute.

"You first!" said the officer, with an air which suffered no reply.

Déroute obeyed; but while Pierre lay down to the right of Belle-Rose, the sergeant placed himself on the left.

"Now, comrades, put aside the tools and make ready the guns! With a blow of the pick I am going to throw down this piece of wall; as soon as the Spaniards see us they will fire."

"That is to say you will take all," murmured Déroute, with a jealous air.

"Yes, all or nothing," replied Belle-Rose, smiling, and he continued: "You shall only rise after they have fired; but then rise all together and leap upon them. Attention now."

Belle-Rose took a pick in both hands and struck. At the third strike the earth gave away, a large breach was opened, and the Spaniards were to be seen aiming their muskets.

"Fire!" cried the officer who commanded them.

But at the officer's cry Bell-Rose had thrown himself flat

on his stomach; the discharge passed over his head. In the midst of the dusk and the obscurity the enemy had seen nothing.

"Stand up!" exclaimed Belle-Rose, in a voice of thunder, and he rushed forward, followed close by his brother and Déroute.

The Spaniards, surprised, were killed upon the spot or disarmed. There were ten of them in the vault. At the first fire only three were left standing. Belle-Rose hastened to wall up the opening with stones and rubbish; he attached the petard, unrolled the match, and ordered Déroute to bring back his little troop. When it had repassed the ditch, Belle-Rose set fire to the match and moved away, but not before having seen the sulphur and powder sparkle. Déroute was upon the side of the ditch, going and coming regardless of the shots fired at him from the rampart by those leaving it.

"Eh," he cried to Belle-Rose, as soon as he saw him, "can't you walk faster?"

"And you," replied Belle-Rose, "can't you stay farther away?"

Both moved away rapidly, but at the end of a hundred steps Belle-Rose felt the soil tremble under their feet.

"Down!" he cried to Déroute, and seizing him by the arm, he forced him to lie down near him in a depression in the ground.

A frightful detonation resounded immediately; a cloud of powder-smoke obscured the air, and a thousand fragments of stone fell around them. When they stood up ninety feet of wall was stretched flat; the ditch was filled by the *débris* and a large breach was opened in the side of the bastion. The garrison had decamped. A corps of soldiers whom Monsieur de Naucrais was holding in reserve rushed forward as soon as the mine had exploded, and installed themselves in the fort without striking a blow. Monsieur de Luxembourg rode toward the scene of action, followed by his officers. As he was passing along he met Belle-Rose running toward the rampart, his clothes in disorder, and covered with powder.

"Ah! it is you, Grinedal?" said Monsieur de Luxembourg; "stop a second to tell me the name of the soldier who set fire to the match."

"Eh!" exclaimed Déroute, "this soldier is an officer."

"Ah!"

"And this officer is my lieutenant."

Monsieur de Luxembourg extended his hand to Belle-Rose.

"These are actions which do not astonish me, coming from you; I will speak of it this evening to His Majesty," he said to him.

The Governor of Tournay, seeing the city dismantled, sent a flag of truce to the camp; the capitulation was signed, and the city opened its gates. This first success excited the joy of the army, which spoke of nothing less than going straight on to Brussels. Toward evening, and as the city was filled with songs, an order informed Belle-Rose that Monsieur de Luxembourg was expecting him in his quarters. The young officer went there and found the general in his tent expediting various orders.

"Grinedal," he said to him, when they were alone, "His Majesty, to whom I have given an account of your excellent conduct, has permitted me to promise you the grade of captain. Your commission is ready for signature."

Belle-Rose thanked his generous protector and regretted that his father was not alive to rejoice over his good fortune.

"But," said Monsieur de Luxembourg, "it is not the general who speaks to you—it is the friend. The friend, Jacques, has once again need of your services and your devotion."

"Speak, and when you have told me what I must do, I will thank you for having chosen me."

"A man in whom I had placed every confidence," continued the general, "has just betrayed me. Perhaps you recollect him through having spoken to him at Witternesse ten years ago?"

"Bergame!" exclaimed Belle-Rose.

"Yes. He is about to sell for the sum of a hundred thousand livres some papers which he has in his hands, and which I had left with him, believing in his honesty. If these papers compromised only myself and the Prince de Condé, I would hardly disturb myself about them. The king, in his sovereign mercy, has wished to forget everything. But they might injure people who have not been suspected; nay, more, they might ruin them, if these papers fall into the hands of Monsieur de Louvois."

"What must be done."

"You must leave for Paris."

"Quit the army!" exclaimed Belle-Rose.

"You will lose fifteen days which you will make up for in a week," replied Monsieur de Luxembourg, growing

animated as he spoke. "And besides, there is no one else that I know to whom I can confide this mission."

"I shall go."

"You will stop at Chantilly, where the prince's intendant will hand you a hundred thousand livres on the presentation of this order. You will afterward go to see Bergame, who lives in the direction of Palaiseau, in a house which I have given him."

"Ah!" said Belle-Rose, with disgust.

"The house is to the right at a hundred steps from the road, before entering the village. Anybody you meet can point it out to you. Bergame does not yet suspect that I am acquainted with his perfidy. All the papers are at his home, in a certain closet which I know well, and in which I have concealed myself more than once in the time of the Fronde. A man who is employed by Monsieur de Louvois has learned of this bargain, he has recollected that he owed me everything, and has warned me."

"Those are the papers you wish."

"By cunning or main force—it matters not which—you must get possession of them."

"Oh! he is an old man!" said Belle-Rose.

"Eh, morbleu!" exclaimed Monsieur de Luxembourg, "the old wolves have the longest teeth. Besides, it is not a question of killing him; you pay the price of the treason and take the papers. Do you know that it concerns the lives of twenty persons?"

"It is well! I will have these papers."

"Then you leave to-morrow."

"I will leave to-night."

"Go, and may God guide you! A first time you have perhaps saved my life, a second time you save my honor. What can I do for you, Grinedal?"

"You will let me participate in a battle."

CHAPTER XXVI.

A DIPLOMATIC MISSION.

An hour after this conversation Belle-Rose left, accompanied by Déroute. Monsieur de Naucrais had taken Pierre under his charge and proposed to push his military education. In order that Belle-Rose's absence might not be interpreted in an unfavorable manner, he had apparently

been charged with a mission for Monsieur de Louvois. On reaching Chantilly, Belle-Rose went to see the prince's intendant, who counted out to him the sum agreed upon.

Having arrived at the house, accompanied by Déroute, whom he left before the door with the horses, Belle-Rose entered the garden by himself.

"Monsieur Bergame?" said he to a litte boy who was plucking fruit.

The little boy, who was pale and sickly looking, looked at Belle-Rose with a cunning air.

"On whose part do you come?" said he, with an Italian accent.

"On my own," replied Belle-Rose.

The little boy saluted him politely.

"It is very well, monsieur, but Monsieur Bergame being very busy cannot receive you at present. You will have to come again."

"Ah!" thought Belle-Rose, "I am in for a siege."

Aloud he said:

"Can you not say to Monsieur Bergame that it concerns a very important affair?"

"For whom, monsieur?" said the child, with a simple air which concealed great cunning.

"Eh, but for him!" exclaimed Belle-Rose.

"Pardon me, monsieur," said the child, in a wheedling tone, "but it is generally the case that strangers who desire to enter always have important affairs to treat."

Belle-Rose felt like seizing the little rascal by the neck and gagging him; but there were people passing along the road, and he did not know the inmates of the house; it was no time to employ violence.

"Come," he replied, with the air of a man who makes up his mind to speak, "since you wish to know all, take this louis for yourself and run to tell Monsieur Bergame that it is a question of receiving a hundred thousand livres."

At sight of the gold, the eyes of the little fellow sparkled. His fingers seized the piece like the claws of a devil-fish, and he requested Belle-Rose to follow him.

"Knavish, but avaricious!" thought Belle-Rose; "one vice corrects the other."

The child left Belle-Rose in a hall on the ground floor, climbed the stair-way which led to the upper story, and came down again two minutes later.

"Follow me, monsieur," said he to Belle-Rose, "Monsieur Bergame is up there waiting for you."

The little boy introduced Belle-Rose into a square room

where the falconer's son at once began to search with his eyes for the famous closet of which Monsieur de Luxembourg had spoken. It was in one corner, behind a curtain which would have concealed it from one less well informed. Monsieur Bergame eyed Belle-Rose with the expression of a cat watching its prey.

"You have a sum of money to turn over to me, did you say, monsieur? or has the child, whose simplicity must be excused, erred in reporting to me your words?"

"This child has told you the truth, Monsieur Bergame, and I am ready to count out to you the hundred thousand livres which have been confided to me."

"Very well, monsieur, it is a sum which I will receive—when you shall have told me why it has been sent to me."

Belle-Rose did not mistake the expression of the glance which Monsieur Bergame gave him. The child was still present; he might prove an embarrassing witness in case it was necessary to employ menace; Belle-Rose resolved to get rid of him.

"That is what I am going to tell you presently; permit me only to go and get the money," and he went out.

What he had foreseen happened. The child followed him.

"Déroute," said Belle-Rose, in a low tone to the sergeant, "while I am unstrapping this valise approach that rascal and gag him."

Peppe—that was the child's name—looked with all his eyes at the valise in which there were supposed to be such beautiful gold-pieces; Déroute tied the horse's bridle around a limb and approached Peppe; but Peppe, who perceived him from the corner of his eye, made two steps back.

"Eh!" said Belle-Rose, letting fall seven or eight gold-pieces, "the money is escaping! Come this way, my little fellow, and take these louis; if you carry four of them up there, you shall have two of them."

And Belle-Rose, taking the valise upon his shoulders, moved away. The child threw himself upon the grass, where the gold sparkled; Déroute leaped upon him, seized him by the neck, and tied a handkerchief over his mouth. Peppe had not even time to utter a sigh, but he had enough presence of mind to slip four or five gold-pieces into his pocket. Belle-Rose, who had seen the whole affair, rapidly remounted to where Monsieur Bergame was.

"Here it is," said he, placing the valise upon the table.

"And Peppe?" asked Monsieur Bergame, whose eyes had opened at the silvery noise of the valise.

"Oh," said the officer, with an unconcerned air, "he is amusing himself by holding my horse by the bridle."

The window of Monsieur Bergame's apartment opened upon an out-of-the-way part of the garden; he had not been able to see anything and had no suspicion.

"Let us come to an understanding," said he, pushing his fauteuil toward the table. "You have come to count me out a hundred thousand livres, and I ask nothing better than to receive them, but still I must know the source from which this sum comes."

Belle-Rose understood that it was necessary to play his cards well—to risk all on the first play.

"It is an exchange," he boldly replied.

"Ah!" said the old man, fixing upon him his small and piercing eyes.

"Money against papers."

"Ah! ah!"

"The money is here, and the papers are there," said Belle-Rose, designating the place where the closet was situated.

"Very well; I take the louis and give you the papers—is that it?"

"Precisely."

"But, my good sir, still you will tell me from whom they come?"

"Eh, parbleu! you know it well."

"Certainly, but I would not be displeased to have the assurance of it."

"Eh! monsieur, I am sent by the minister."

"Monsieur de Louvois?"

"Himself."

"Then you have a letter of introduction, some slips of paper with his signature."

"A commission, is it not?" said Belle-Rose, without blinking.

"Exactly."

Belle-Rose had just taken his part; while Monsieur Bergame was speaking, the lieutenant's hand had slipped under his cloak.

"My commission," said he, "here it is."

And he raised his pistol till it was on a level with Monsieur Bergame's countenance.

"If you say a word, if you make the least gesture, you are a dead man," he added.

But Monsieur Bergame took care not to cry out; frozen with terror, he was trembling in his fauteuil.

"Well," said Belle-Rose; "I see you understand me. I well knew that we would end by coming to an understanding. What do you wish? A hundred thousand livres? here they are. What do I want? papers? I take them; we are quits."

"But, monsieur, it is a ruffianly act," murmured Monsieur Bergame, in a voice stifled by fear.

"Ah! monsieur, you are mistaken. It is a restitution."

"Ah! my God! what is the minister going to say?" said, in a low tone, Monsieur Bergame, who followed with terror the movements of Belle-Rose.

"Eh! my dear sir, you will tell him that you have wound up the affair with another."

While speaking Belle-Rose had burst the locks of the closet, and had taken possession of a package of papers inclosed in a casket. He threw a rapid glance over them; they were letters yellowed by time and lists filled with names, upon which were to be seen the signatures of Monsieur de Condé and Monsieur de Botteville.

"Done," said Belle-Rose; "you have the sum, I have the merchandise. Adieu, my good Monsieur Bergame."

Saluting the poor man, he went out, taking care to bolt the door behind him.

"Déroute, to horse!" said Belle-Rose, as soon as he was in the garden.

The sergeant's foot was already in the stirrups; they left at headlong speed. Peppe had succeeded in disembarrassing himself of his bonds, which had not been difficult as soon as he was rid of Déroute's surveillance. His first care was to run to his master and deliver him. Monsieur Bergame, who dreaded above all things the anger of Monsieur de Louvois, at once ordered Peppe to set out in pursuit of the ravisher. He had the money, he would not have been vexed to get back the papers. Peppe, informed of the facts, leaped upon a horse and hastened after the two cavaliers. Peppe was an Italian, and though a child, extremely vindictive. Belle-Rose's horse and that of the sergeant had made quite a journey that same morning; they had not rested, while that of Peppe was fresh. Belle-Rose and Déroute had their spurs; Peppe had his hatred. He reached them at the barriers of Paris. The little Italian followed them at a distance and saw them enter the house of Monsieur Mériset. When the door had closed upon them, Peppe ran to a place where he was sure to find some men

of the police. Monsieur Mériset welcomed Belle-Rose with that soft and mysterious smile which was customary with him.

"I have had a little dinner prepared for you," said he, rubbing his hands.

"Very good; but before tasting it, I would be much obliged to you, my dear Monsieur Mériset, if you would be so kind as to render me a service."

"What is it?"

"That of lighting me a good fire in my room."

Monsieur Mériset looked at Belle-Rose with an astonished air.

"Are you sick?"

"Not at all."

"It is that fire in the month of June——"

"Make it, my dear host; fire does not only serve to warm by, it burns."

Monsieur Mériset did not understand Belle-Rose's reply, but like a man who was accustomed to obey, he disappeared. As soon as the fagots were ablaze, Belle-Rose mounted to his room, tore the strings which surrounded the papers, and set to work to burn them. At this moment a great tumult burst out upon the stair-way, the voice of Monsieur de Mériset was heard in disputation, and also that of Peppe. Belle-Rose rushed to the door and pushed to the bolts. The papers were all in the fire. In the midst of the noise made by the Italian, Monsieur Mériset, and the police officer disputing, Belle-Rose approached a window which opened upon the garden. That of the lower hall, where, Déroute had remained, opened just below it.

"Hey! sergeant," said Belle-Rose, in a low tone.

"The police are here. Slip out of the house and be ready to fly."

"Are you coming?"

"No; they are knocking at the door, and the papers are not all consumed yet."

"Then I shall stay."

"As you choose; but when both of us are in prison, which of us will save the other."

"Well, I shall leave."

"Go and tell Monsieur de Luxembourg what you have seen."

They were knocking furiously upon the door. Belle-Rose looked toward the chimney; the papers were three-fourths burned. He pushed with his foot what were left in the fire-place,

"Open in the name of the king," said a voice outside.

"The shortest way would be to burst in the door," said the flute-like voice of the child.

Three blows with the butt-end of a musket answered him; the wood cracked, and the child, sure that the ravisher could not escape on that side, ran to the garden. Belle-Rose, kneeling in front of the chimney, was stirring up what was left of the papers. Peppe suddenly showed his face at the window; in one bound he reached the hearth, pushed aside Belle-Rose, and sought and searched between the irons. A cloud of ashes were scattered over the child's face. Peppe arose.

"Monsieur," said he to the officer, throwing a viper-like glance at Belle-Rose, "there is the man who stole the papers belonging to Monsieur Bergame."

"Eh, boy," replied Belle-Rose, "you should not lie; I have purchased what was for sale."

"Papers which were destined to Monsieur de Louvois!" replied the child, who had grown slightly pale.

This redoubtable name, of which Peppe had already employed the influence, again produced its effect.

"March, monsieur," said the officer.

The gallop of a horse resounded in the Rue du Pot-de-Fer St. Sulpice. Belle-Rose smiled and turned to the officer.

"Where do you take me, monsieur?" he said to him.

"To the Bastile."

CHAPTER XXVII.

TWO WOMEN'S HEARTS.

Déroute never stopped in his journey from Paris to Douai, where the army now was. Monsieur de Luxembourg had pushed on in the direction of Belgium by way of Limbourg. Pierre was the first person whom Déroute informed of Belle-Rose's misadventure. Pierre, on hearing this narrative, threw his musket to the ground with so much violence that he broke the stock.

"Run to see the Irishman, I am going to see Monsieur de Naucrais," he said to him.

Monsieur de Naucrais thought of Monsieur de Luxembourg; Cornelius thought of Madame de Châteaufort. The one knew the honor of the gentleman, the other had tested the heart of the woman. Two hours after, Monsieur

de Naucrais left for Limbourg and Cornelius for Arras. At the name of Cornelius O'Brien, Madame de Châteaufort gave orders to introduce the young Irishman into her presence. The duchess was in an oratory in which penetrated only a doubtful light; she was clothed in a long robe which concealed her neck and arms. A pale smile half parted her lips on seeing Cornelius.

"What brings you?" she said to him; "are you going to give me the joy of thinking that I can be of some service to you?"

"Not to me, but to another, madame."

"Speak!" said the duchess, who had Belle-Rose's name upon her lips and dared not pronounce it.

"Belle-Rose is arrested."

"Arrested! did you say?" exclaimed Madame de Châteaufort, fixing her frightened glance upon Cornelius.

Cornelius related the circumstances which had preceded and accompanied this arrest. Madame de Châteaufort listened to him with clasped hands. When she learned that Belle-Rose had been taken to the Bastile, she shivered.

"It is a terrible place," said she; "some leave it to lose their lives, others remain there to die."

"We must get him out, madame, and get him out alive."

"Certainly, I will do all I can, but am I sure of succeeding?"

"You? but you have already saved him from death. You will save him from prison, too."

Madame de Châteaufort shook her head.

"I was powerful then, and he was only a soldier," said she. "I have lost my credit, and he is now a criminal of state."

"He!" said Cornelius, frightened.

"Eh! you do not know what the court is and how the innocent are transformed into the guilty. You do not know Monsieur de Louvois; ferocious, violent, and imperious, he hates those who wound him, and he is not the man to pardon Belle-Rose."

"He need not pardon him, but let him give him back his liberty. He will not dare to refuse you."

"Perhaps not, if I were still young, beautiful, and powerful. Look at me and tell me if I am she whom you knew three months ago. I have left the court, others have come, and I am forgotten. Oh, do not say no, those who move around a king forget quickly!"

"What must we do, then?" exclaimed Cornelius.

"Attempt everything and pray God. I will go to see

Monsieur de Louvois, I will speak to him and leave him only after having exhausted every resource. For sad and depressed though I am, I still recollect that I am Madame de Châteaufort."

At this outburst of a soul proud even in distress, Cornelius felt shine in his heart a ray of hope.

"You will save him!" he exclaimed.

"Oh!" she rejoined, "I will go even to the king if it is necessary before letting him perish. But stay, I would be quite sure of his life if some woman with credit at court interested herself in his fate."

"A woman?" said Cornelius.

"Yes," replied Genevieve; "if women cannot influence Monsieur de Louvois, they certainly can the king. Monsieur de Luxembourg is compromised; he can be of no assistance to us. A woman is our only resource."

"But you, madame?" exclaimed Cornelius.

"Oh! I am disgraced—my husband is no longer anything, and even my name is no longer known."

"After you, madame," replied Cornelius, "I know only Madame d'Albergotti."

"Madame d'Albergotti!" repeated Genevieve, trembling from head to foot.

"The friend of Belle-Rose and the protectress of his sister."

Madame de Châteaufort had bowed her forehead over her beautiful hand. After a moment's silence, she resumed:

"Well! it is necessary for Madame d'Albergotti to go herself to see the king."

Madame de Châuteaufort spoke with an extraordinary emotion.

"Madame d'Albergotti is at Compiègne with her husband, whose condition has not permitted him to go to Paris," said Cornelius; "so I have been informed by a young person attached to the marquise."

"In going to Paris to see Monsieur de Louvois, I will pass by Compiègne and first see Madame d'Albergotti."

Madame de Châteaufort arose after these words and took leave of Cornelius.

Just as the Irish gentleman was retiring she took his hand and pressed it strongly.

"Count upon me, whatever happens," said she.

Monsieur de Luxembourg manifested much grief when Monsieur de Naucrais related to him the arrest of Belle-Rose.

"I do not know yet whether I can do much," said the duke to the colonel, "but believe me that I shall do all I can. I will see the Prince de Condé and come to an understanding with him concerning this affair. The worst is that Monsieur de Louvois hates me. My name is a bad recommendation with the minister."

"And the king?"

"The king is waiting; he has not yet tried me. If I risked only my sword and my rank, I would not hesitate a moment to go to see him; but I would expose Belle-Rose to all the resentment of Monsieur de Louvois without having the certainty of being able to guarantee him against it. As yet he is only a prisoner; let us not rush things, for fear he may be treated as a criminal. But, I have told you, count upon me."

Madame de Châteaufort lost no time and left during the night for Paris. Passing by Compiègne the next day, she had Madame d'Albergotti's house pointed out to her and went to it. Madame d'Albergotti quitted her husband to receive her. She seemed fatigued by long vigils and suffering from a secret malady. Genevieve looked at her for a moment, seeking to subdue her emotion. At the name of Madame de Châteaufort, Suzanne had stifled a cry of surprise. Both knew each other without ever having spoken to each other.

"What do you desire of me, madame?" said Suzanne.

"Madame," replied Genevieve, "an unfortunate accident has struck a person for whom you profess sentiments of friendship; Belle-Rose has been arrested."

Madame d'Albergotti paled at these words.

"He has been arrested by order of Monsieur de Louvois and taken to the Bastile," continued Madame de Châteaufort.

Madame d'Albergotti pressed her hand to her heart and tottered. The cold chill of death had seized her. But Madame de Châteaufort was before her, and Suzanne struggled against her emotions.

"I do not seek to hide the grief which this news causes me," said she. "Monsieur Jacques Grinedal was my childhood friend; but however much I regret his misfortune, what can I do for him?"

"He is in prison, death threatens him, and you ask me what you can do for him?" exclaimed the duchess.

Suzanne looked at Madame de Châteaufort and waited.

"But you can save him!" said Genevieve.

"How can I do it? Speak, and if honor permits me, I am ready."

"You have been presented to the king, have you not?" continued Madame de Châteaufort, rapidly.

"I was presented to him at Charleroi by Monsieur d'Albergotti."

"His Majesty, they say, holds the marquis in high esteem."

"His Majesty has given him the assurance of it by giving him the government of a considerable place."

"Well, madame, Belle-Rose's life is in the hands of the king, and he alone can snatch it from the hands of Monsieur de Louvois. Run to Lille and obtain his intervention between Belle-Rose and the minister."

Suzanne felt her heart breaking. She saw Belle-Rose's pardon dependent upon her decision and remained mute.

"He is at the Bastile! what are you waiting for, madame?" said Genevieve.

"Monsieur d'Albergotti is here," said Suzanne, in a dying voice.

"He loves you, and you hesitate!"

"It is because he loves me that I hesitate!" exclaimed Suzanne; "I must remain worthy of that love. He himself would repulse me if I left this house where honor detains me. If I were free, I would be near him; married, I remain where my husband is."

"This, then, is the way you love, my God!" exclaimed Genevieve, with hands extended toward heaven. "If he had loved me as he loves you, I would have forgotten everything."

"Each has his heart," said Suzanne; "God sees us and God judges us."

"Oh! you have never loved him."

"I have not loved him!" exclaimed Suzanne, who was wringing her hands in despair; "but do you know that since my childhood this heart has had no pulsation which has not been his, that I exist only through his memory, that I love him so profoundly that I should not wish to bring him a life in which the shadow of a fault had passed, a soul which the breath of evil had tarnished. You say that I do not love him; he has loved and I have suffered; he has forgotten and I have recollected! I live in my house as in a cloister. I pray and I weep—I am in the world as if I did not exist. My life flows away between God whom I invoke and a sick man whom I console. I have neither joy, repose, nor contentment. I have made

of marriage a tomb, and you say that I do not love him!"

Never had Suzanne spoken with this exaltation; Genevieve looked at her with surprise, and felt touched even to tears at the aspect of that countenance in which were reflected all the sacrifices of a soul a moment unvailed. Genevieve fell to her knees.

"You love him! you love him! my God! What am I beside you?"

When Suzanne returned to Monsieur d'Albergotti she was very pale, and her reddened eyes still preserved the traces of the tears which she had shed.

Meanwhile Madame de Châteaufort pushed straight on to Paris. She descended from the carriage only to mount to Monsieur de Louvois' room. At the first words which she uttered touching on the affair which had brought her to Paris, the minister stopped her.

"Belle-Rose owes you his life once already. He shall not owe you anything else."

Madame de Châteaufort let escape a gesture of astonishment.

"Oh!" continued Monsieur de Louvois, "memory is one of the requirements of my profession. I forget nothing. Belle-Rose's new crime is not one of those for which a man is beheaded, but it is sufficient to detain him in prison the rest of his life. He is at the Bastile—he shall stay there."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE ARGUMENTS OF A MINISTER.

After the accustomed formalities which preceded the incarceration of a prisoner in the Bastile, Belle-Rose had been taken to a room which had a view giving upon the Faubourg St. Antoine. He heard the bolts close and found himself alone. When night came the profoundest obscurity enveloped him; it was with difficulty that he recognized, by the pale light which came from it, the place where the window opened. It was narrow and provided with stout iron bars. At a musket-shot below, the little houses of the Faubourg St. Antoine showed their roofs. Here and there, in the midst of the shadows shone immovable lights which were located in these houses. Belle-Rose leaned against the window-sill, and looked at that corner of the great city from which mounted still a little of that murmur

which floats unceasingly over Paris. One of the lights disappeared, then another, then still another. Presently only three or four were to be distinguished which shone like stars fallen from heaven. While Belle-Rose was contemplating them, an indefinable emotion penetrated his heart; it seemed to him that these lights were the images of those whom he had known. One of those radiant sparks suddenly carried away by an invisible hand, recalled to him Monsieur d'Assonville killed in the prime of life; a red light, which brusquely disappeared in the sinister folds of the night, made him recollect Monsieur de Villebrais and the funereal hour which had sounded his death; farther still, a soft and trembling light, slowly eclipsed behind a thick curtain, made him think of his father, whose life had been so honest and whose death had been so loyal.

As he was meditating thus, he heard the bolts of his cell creak; the door opened, the red light of a torch illumined his room, and Belle-Rose saw, on turning round, the lieutenant of the Bastile preceded by a turnkey and followed by three or four soldiers.

"Monsieur," the officer said to him, "I have an order to bring you to the council-room where the governor is expecting you."

"I follow you," replied Belle-Rose.

His escort threaded a long corridor, at the end of which they descended a stair-way which led to an interior court of the Bastile. They traversed it, passed under a porch, mounted another stair-way and stopped before a vaulted room which adjoined the military lodgings of the governor. The governor was standing near a personage unknown to Belle-Rose, but who seemed all-powerful, judging from the respectful manner with which the governor spoke to him. When Belle-Rose was introduced, this personage turned toward him. From the description given him while in the army, Belle-Rose recognized Monsieur de Louvois. The redoubtable minister fixed upon him a piercing look as if he had wished to read the very depth of his heart. Belle-Rose waited with head elevated and glance firm.

"Approach, monsieur," the minister said to him.

Belle-Rose made a step forward.

"Is it indeed you who have gone this morning to Monsieur Bergame's?" continued Monsieur de Louvois.

"I am the man."

"You have taken from him papers which were destined to me?"

"I have paid for papers which were for sale."

"But I had purchased these papers?"

"In a similar affair, the thing belongs to him who presents himself first."

"Eh, monsieur, you have some audacity," said the minister, ironically; "but I will know how to draw from you what I wish."

"That depends on what you wish."

There was a moment's silence, during which the two interlocutors examined each other. Monsieur de Louvois was the first to break it.

"You have burned these papers, monsieur?"

"Yes, monsiegneur."

"All?"

"All."

"Did you learn their contents?"

"No, monseigneur."

"But you suspected, then, what they contained, since you have made such haste to secure their disappearance."

"I might suppose at least that they had some importance, seeing the haste with which I was pursued."

"And you are not deceived. You would not be here were it not the case."

"I slightly suspect it."

"A word can draw you from it, monsieur."

"Only one, monseigneur?"

"Only one. You see that my conditions are light."

"Eh! monseigneur, there are words which are worth heads."

"Take care, also, that silence does not endanger yours."

Monsieur de Louvois was getting angry; as to Belle-Rose, he lost nothing of his calm and proud tranquillity.

"Let us dismiss that!" resumed the minister, "the question is whether or not you wish to save your head."

"Is it threatened, monseigneur?"

"More, perhaps, than you think."

"And all this because I have paid a hundred thousand livres for those papers which I have not read. Blood for ink, you are lavish, monseigneur."

"A word can save you," said Monsieur de Louvois, who could hardly restrain his anger.

"And what is the word?"

"The name of the person for whom you carried off these papers,"

Belle-Rose did not reply.

"Have you heard me, monsieur?" exclaimed the minister.

"Perfectly."

"Why do you not speak, then?"

"The truth is that it is impossible for me to do so."

"And why?"

"If I told you that I have taken them for myself and of my own volition, would you believe me?"

"Certainly not."

"Then you think I am the repository of a person who has placed his confidence in me. To speak would be a cowardice which you would not seriously propose to me; you see, then, monseigneur, that I ought to be silent."

"This is all you have to say?"

"You should be convinced of it by this time."

"I might believe it, monsieur, did we not have here marvelous instruments for snatching words from those who are most mute."

"Try," said Belle-Rose, and he crossed his arms upon his breast.

Monsieur de Louvois looked at him a moment without speaking, and then arose. Upon a sign of his hand, the officer who had brought Belle-Rose took him back to his cell. When they were alone, the governor of the Bastile approached Monsieur de Louvois.

"Hold, monseigneur," he said to him, "I know something about faces. That is a young man whom we will not succeed in making speak. He will die; that is all."

"We shall see," murmured Monsieur de Louvois.

Scarcely had Belle-Rose been recommitted to his cell than he ran to the window. Far away in the shadows of the night some lights were still shining. Belle-Rose went to sleep, calm and smiling. The next day was passed without any new incident coming to disturb the prisoner in his meditations. About the dinner hour a turnkey slipped into his hand a slip of paper and moved away, his finger upon his lips. Belle-Rose opened the paper and found only these words, "A friend is watching over you." At the first glance he recognized the handwriting of Genevieve.

"Poor woman!" said he, between two sighs, "she recollects, and it is of Suzanne I am thinking."

When night had come, Belle-Rose approached the window, and as on the evening before, he began to count the trembling lights which shone in the darkness. For an

hour or two he had been absorbed in this mute contemplation, when he heard footsteps in the corridor which bordered on his cell. The same officer who had come the evening before advanced toward him, and in a grave voice asked him if he were disposed to follow him. Belle-Rose, for sole reply, walked toward the door. This evening the escort took a different route from that which it had followed the first time. After having threaded several somber corridors, traversed black vaults where the footsteps of the soldiers reverberated by the echoes sounded in cadence, mounted and descended divers narrow and funereal stair-ways, they entered an oblong hall which was lit up by four flambeaux attached to the walls. A clerk was seated before a little table, on which was to be seen all that which were necessary for writing. Along the sides there shone in the red light of the torches sinister instruments of a strange form. At the foot of the wall were wooden horses, chains, and pincers; a chafing-dish was burning in an obscure recess, oak planks and mallets stained with blood were heaped together in one corner along with cords and wedges. Near the clerk was seated a man dressed in black, whom Belle-Rose took for a physician. The governor of the Bastile, sad and grave, was finishing reading a letter, two steps from the table. On the arrival of Belle-Rose, the governor crumpled up the letter, pushed a chair near the clerk's table, and sat down, after having saluted the prisoner. From the preparations he saw, Belle-Rose understood that the hour had come; he recommended his soul to God, murmured the name of Suzanne as he would have done a prayer, and waited.

"You heard yesterday what Monsieur de Louvois said to you, monsieur," the governor said to him; "do you still persist in your refusal to make known the name of the person who charged you with carrying off Monsieur Bergame's papers?"

"I do."

"I must warn you that I have received orders to employ against you the means of which the law authorizes the use if you continue to keep silent."

"You will do your duty, monsieur; I will endeavor to do mine."

The governor was silent for some minutes; the clerk was writing down the replies.

"Therefore, monsieur, you have nothing more to declare?" said the governor.

"Nothing."

"Let your will be done."

The governor made a sign to two men whom Belle-Rose had not remarked, and who had remained up to this moment in an obscure corner of the hall. These two men seized the prisoner and began to undress him. When he no longer had anything on except his trousers and his shirt, they extended him upon a sort of long chair; his arms were tied to the rounds of the chair, and the physician approached the patient. Belle-Rose had not made the least resistance to all this. When he was half stretched out upon the chair the governor asked him if he still persisted in his refusal.

"I cannot desert at the moment of combat," Belle-Rose answered him, with a pale smile.

"Then the order must be executed," said the governor.

One of the torturers brought near the chair two large buckets full of water, filled a pint cup, and advanced it to the patient's lips.

"Ah!" said Belle-Rose, "it is the torture of water."

"Yes, monsieur," said the physician, "it sometimes kills, but if one escapes it, one is not mutilated."

Belle-Rose thanked the governor by a look and swallowed the pint of water. A second one was presented to him, but he could not drink it all. One of the assistants laid his head back and emptied the pint even to the last drop. Belle-Rose trembled.

"We are ready to receive your confessions, monsieur," the governor said; "do you wish to speak?"

A third pint was raised to the height of Belle-Rose's lips, he drank a few swallows, but his teeth came together by a convulsive movement, and the water flowed over his naked breast.

"Do you still persist in your silence, monsieur?" interrupted the governor.

"Yes," said Belle-Rose, in a choking voice.

One of the torturers half parted his lips by the aid of a piece of iron, introduced into Belle-Rose's mouth the neck of a funnel, and poured down another pint. Belle-Rose grew horribly pale; his fingers clasped the wood, and with a shock, extorted by grief, he shook the chair upon which he was tied. Another pint of water disappeared in the funnel, then still another. Great drops of sweat rolled down the patient's forehead, his eyes became blood-shot, and his cheeks took on a bluish tinge. The governor reiterated his question; Belle-Rose could still hear, but no longer being able to reply, he made a negative sign of the

head. The funnel was filled again. A violent convulsion agitated the body of the patient, he uttered a hollow cry, stiffened his limbs, broke the bonds which bound one of his arms, seized the funnel, crushed it between his fingers, and, overwhelmed by suffering, fell back fainting upon the chair. The physician, who had been consulting Belle-Rose's pulse, placed his hand upon the patient's heart.

"Well?" asked the governor.

"Eh!" said the physician, "he is a vigorous subject. He could still be made to swallow one or two pints; but at the third he would run the risk of dying."

The valets got ready the funnel and buckets.

"Is he in a condition to hear me?" said the governor.

"Him?" said the physician. "Eh, monsieur, the trumpets of Jericho might sound without making him move! Nevertheless we have a means of returning to patients the use of their senses."

"What is it?"

"Hot irons."

"They are ready," said one of the torturers, pointing out with his finger the chafing-dish.

The governor stopped him with a gesture; horror and pity were depicted upon his face.

"We have had enough of that. I will inform Monsieur de Louvois of the result of this sitting, and we shall see about it after," said he.

Upon his order Belle-Rose was carried back to his room; the physician followed him. When the sad cortege had passed the door, the governor shook his head.

"I had predicted it," he murmured. "He is one of those men who die and do not speak."

CHAPTER XXIX.

WHAT WOMAN WISHES, GOD WISHES.

Informed by the governor of what had taken place during the night at the Bastile, Monsieur de Louvois shrugged his shoulders.

"It is unfortunate," said he, "that Belle-Rose belongs to Monsieur de Luxembourg. Were it not for this fact, we might have made something out of him."

"What! monseigneur, you know?"

"I know everything; while you were submitting him to

the question, a courier has arrived from Flanders; I have learned that the same night of Belle-Rose's departure the young officer had had a conference with Monsieur de Luxembourg; the details of a scene which took place in the camp at Charleroi apropos of a captain who had incurred the death penalty, have been related to me; I have learned everything; the soldier has been the general's instrument."

"May I ask your excellency what you count on doing?"

"Me? nothing."

"The question, then, becomes useless?"

"Altogether so."

"And the prisoner can be liberated?"

"No. I forget him—that is all."

The governor understood the terrible significance of these words, which condemned Belle-Rose to perpetual imprisonment.

"It must be known," said the minister, rising, "that through me everything can be done, that without me nothing can be done."

"Permit me to hope, monseigneur, that you will authorize me to one day resume this conversation."

"So be it; I adjourn you to twenty years."

While these things were transpiring at Paris, Madame d'Albergotti was lavishing on her husband the most tender caresses; her face had become as white as a taper; her hands seemed as transparent as alabaster. When evening came Claudine accompanied her to her room, which adjoined that of the marquis.

"My God! you are killing yourself," the poor girl said to her, as she embraced her.

"Leave," answered Suzanne, sadly, "it is for me the coming of repose."

One night, the third since the visit of Madame de Châteaufort, Monsieur d'Albergotti called Suzanne. Suzanne was already at his bedside.

"You are suffering?" said she.

"No, I am finishing with it."

Suzanne opened her mouth to speak, but Monsieur d'Albergotti stopped her with a gesture.

"I have sent for you," he continued, "to let you receive my farewell. I have always loved you as a father loves his child, you have returned this affection as much as it was in you to do so; you have been honest, pious, and resigned; God owes you a recompense. Approach, Suzanne, so that I may bless you."

Suzanne knelt down near the bed; she had well understood from Monsieur d'Albergotti's air that something strange and mysterious was passing in him. Monsieur d'Albergotti placed both of his hands upon his young wife's forehead and prayed. Presently his hands grew heavy and cold. Suzanne parted them and looked at her husband. The old captain had just surrendered his soul to God. Madame d'Albergotti kissed him on the forehead, and went to kneel under the image of Christ, where she passed the night in prayer. After she had paid the last tributes to her husband's remains she commanded a carriage and horses. Claudine had never seen her so prompt and resolute.

"Is it to Paris that we are going?" she said to her.

"No! The king is in Flanders, it is to Flanders that I am going. I am free now, and Belle-Rose is suffering."

While Suzanne was flying over the route to Lille, the captive, overwhelmed by the intolerable sufferings which he had experienced, remained stretched out in his bed. His mind was covered by a vail. The fourth day he rose up. The turnkey, who had already slipped a paper in his hand, came to him and let fall at his feet another rolled paper. Belle-Rose picked it up and found upon it these words:

"If you are sick, remain sick; if you are not, pretend to be so."

This time it was Suzanne's writing. Belle-Rose concealed the paper over his heart, went to bed again and waited. Meanwhile Cornelius and Déroute had arrived at Paris, urged on by an uneasiness which they did not seek to subdue. Monsieur de Naucrais had anticipated the desires of the sergeant by giving him an unlimited leave.

"Here is a signature which prevents my deserting," said Déroute, pressing the paper. "When I was commanding the drill and thinking of my lieutenant, my halberd was like a red-hot iron in my hands."

"Go," said Monsieur de Naucrais, "and attempt everything to save him. If we were not before the enemy, you should not leave alone."

As to Madame de Châteaufort, she went from the Bastille to Monsieur de Louvois, mournful and despairing. This time the proud and valiant Spanish woman felt herself conquered. One day as she was alone in her oratory, she saw Madame d'Albergotti enter. Forgetting at the same time both her abandoned love and her devouring jealousy, she ran to her rival and seized her hands.

"Saved?" said she.

Suzanne shook her head. Genevieve let fall her arms.

"What! madame, the king himself——"

"The king is the king," said Suzanne, with a poignant expression, "he is egotism crowned. He has made a buckler of reasons of state. I have wept on my knees, and here I am."

"Lost! my God! lost!" exclaimed Genevieve.

"Not yet; so long as I live I hope."

Genevieve, astonished at this firm and resolute language, looked at Suzanne.

"Oh!" continued the young widow, "I am no longer the woman you saw at Compiégne. I can love him without fear now, and risk everything to save him. I will stake my fortune and my life to do so."

"You do not know Monsieur de Louvois!" said Madame de Châteaufort, gnawed by despair.

"I know what an honest and determined heart can do. He hates him, I love him; we shall see."

Genevieve stifled a sigh.

"Try, madame; I will do all that I can to aid you."

Suzanne having asked her what had transpired since the day of imprisonment, Genevieve related to her all that she knew and all that she had attempted. At the recital of the tortures inflicted on Belle-Rose, Suzanne shivered.

"Louis XIV. is King of France, and this is what he permits?" she exclaimed, with horror.

They were still together when a lackey came to warn the duchess that a man was at the door, insisting on being introduced into her presence.

"Who is this man?" said she.

"He says his name is Déroute," replied the lackey.

"Let him enter at once," said Suzanne.

"What do you know and what do you want?" said Madame de Châteaufort, when Déroute had been introduced.

"I know that my lieutenant is in prison, and I wish him free," replied the honest sergeant.

"Well," said Suzanne, "it is necessary to aid him to escape."

"From the Bastile? Eh! madame, it would be as easy to draw one of the damned from the claws of the devil! There are sentinels at every door, doors in all the passages, and turnkeys everywhere. The walls are one hundred and twenty feet high, the ditches twenty feet deep, and I

do not know a hole where there are not bars as large as the arm."

"Nevertheless there is no dungeon, no fortress, no citadel from which one cannot leave. Nothing is impossible to the will."

"Nothing, when it is aided by time. You do not know, then, what it is to escape from a prison of state? It is necessary to meditate it in the shadow, to deceive a thousand looks, to watch for the propitious hour, to leave nothing to accident. It is the work of patience. It calls for years, and when one succeeds, it sometimes happens that the prisoner has white hair. Do you wish to wait, madame?"

"Oh, that would be to die!" exclaimed Suzanne.

"My God! what must we do?" said Genevieve.

"Draw him from the Bastile with an order from the minister," added the sergeant.

"He will never grant it!" said both women at the same time.

"Oh, I understand myself. There are other prisons in France, small Bastiles scattered here and there in the provinces. Only obtain his transfer to one of them, and I charge myself with the rest."

"What do you mean?" asked Suzanne.

"I have my plan. During the twenty-four hours I have been at Paris I have gone in all directions. When a man has been a soldier for ten or twelve years, he has comrades everywhere. Corporal Grippard, who has come into a small heritage, is here with four or five old sappers who are ready for anything. The Irishman is like a madman."

"But," said Genevieve, "it will be a battle."

"Bless me!" said the sergeant, "if the balls fly, we shall endeavor to avoid them."

"Well, I will get that order!" exclaimed Suzanne. "Go and prepare everything."

"All right, but I still need something."

"What?"

"Gold."

"I have my diamonds!" exclaimed the duchess.

"Good! yellow pieces can be made of those little white stones."

Madame d'Albergotti was making for the door, when Déroute stopped her.

"Do you know a means of getting a warning to our lieutenant?" he asked her.

"I have it," said Genevieve. "A turnkey who has been

in my father's service has already consented to place a note in Belle-Rose's possession, providing he is paid for it."

"Recommend him, madame, to go to bed. This note will give him a little courage, and his feigned malady will facilitate the obtaining of the order for changing his prison."

Suzanne already held a pen in her hand; she promptly wrote some words. We have seen how Belle-Rose received them. The same day Suzanne presented herself at Monsieur de Louvois'. Monsieur d'Albergotti's widow was immediately introduced; but at the name of Belle-Rose the minister frowned.

"It is a strange persistence," said he; "it seems to me that I have already refused to set him at liberty."

"Therefore it is not that which I come to solicit from your clemency."

"What is it, then?"

"The order of placing Belle-Rose in a prison in which he can receive the consolation and aid which his state of health call for."

"Ah! he is sick, then?"

"Did not the order to apply the question to him come from you, monseigneur?" replied Suzanne.

"But what powerful interest induces you to work in favor of this prisoner?" interrupted Monsieur de Louvois.

"I am his *fiancee*," replied Suzanne, who blushed, but did not lower her eyes.

Monsieur de Louvois bowed.

"Let your will be done!" said he, writing some words upon a printed order, whose blanks alone required filling up.

Monsieur de Louvois rang a bell; an usher presented himself, he handed the order to him and arose.

"Belle-Rose will be transported to the citadel of Châlons," said he; "you will be permitted to see him. After the crime of which he has rendered himself guilty, it is all that I can do for him, and I would not have done it had you not been his betrothed."

Déroute had lost no time. The men whom he had associated with him were only waiting for a signal to act, and following the advice which he had received from Madame d'Albergotti, he held himself in readiness. The next day, at nightfall, the lieutenant of the Bastile entered Belle-Rose's room and told him that an order of the minister sent him to the citadel of Châlons.

"A post-chaise will take you," he said to him.

Belle-Rose got up and dressed. An officer was waiting for him outside the somber fortress; near him were two soldiers of the mounted police. The postilion was in the saddle. The officer was the same one who had arrested him in the Rue du Pot-de-Fer St. Sulpice, at Monsieur Mériset's. One of the guards was Bouletord. The ex-cannoneer saluted Belle-Rose with a smile.

"We have played quits or double, and I have won," he said to him.

Belle-Rose was passing without replying, when, raising his eyes, he saw on horseback, in the costume of a postilion, the honest Déroute, who was cracking his whip and had just raised a bandage which he had applied to his face so as not to be recognized. A cry of surprise came near bursting from the lips of the prisoner, but the sergeant placed a finger upon his lips, and Belle-Rose leaped upon the step of the carriage.

"Eh!" said he to Bouletord, "it is another game which begins."

The officer sat down beside Belle-Rose. The two guards placed themselves upon the front seat, and Déroute brandished his whip.

"Eh! comrades," he exclaimed, "pass your arms through the straps, the road is bad, there will be some jolting."

"What the devil is he talking about?" murmured the officer; "the road is smooth as a floor, and it has not rained for a month."

Belle-Rose said nothing and passed his arm through a strap, which he clasped tightly. Evidently the advice was for him. The duchess' gold had done wonders. Déroute had made drunk ten postilions before discovering the one who was to drive the prisoner's chaise. As to this one, he had not been able to resist the offer of a purse in which the louis shone between the silken meshes. His philosophy had deemed that a blue vest laced with silver, a pair of buckskin pants, great boots, and the honor of driving a prisoner of state were not worth two thousand livres. The carriage set out in the direction of the Barriére d'Enfer; at some leagues from there, slightly beyond Villejuif, an obstacle forced the carriage to stop. A tree had fallen upon one side of the road; on the other side was an immovable wagon.

"Eh, man with the wagon!" cried Déroute, "make way for the servants of the king."

The man with the chariot poked his head out of the hay, gaped, stretched out his arms, and went to sleep again.

Déroute let fly his whip at him, but the lash struck the hay three feet from the sleeper.

"Eh, monsieur officer!" said Déroute, "here is a terrible sleeper who bars the way. Ask one of your brave men to pull his ears for him."

The officer opened the portière, and Bouletord jumped into the road. He began by pulling the wagon, which rolled slowly forward; but the sleeper, awakened by the shock, descended from his hay and ran to Bouletord, who immediately grabbed him by the collar. Unfortunately the man with the wagon was not of a disposition to surrender without resistance; he answered by such a vigorous blow of the fist that Bouletord rolled over on the ground. Immediately Déroute urged on his horses with so much skill that the wheel struck a tree, and the carriage overturned on the side where the officer was sitting, of whom Belle-Rose made a stepping-stone for leaving the vehicle. Four or five men, who seemed to spring up from the earth, rushed to the road and ran to the carriage as if to aid Déroute to arise. In the midst of the commotion into which this fall had thrown the officer, neither he nor his comrade thought of the possibility of an ambuscade. The new-comers had the appearance of honest men who only asked to aid them; but the officer and the guard, drawn from the chaise by their assistance, were immediately gagged and bound. As to Belle-Rose, he aided Cornelius—who was no other than the man with the chariot—to overcome Bouletord.

"Let us be wise," said Belle-Rose to the ex-cannoneer, who, bruised by the blows which he had received, was foaming with rage in a rut; "it is another game which I win."

When the officer and the two guards were unable to defend themselves, Déroute and his comrades set to work to right the carriage.

"This is what they call carrying a town without firing a gun," said the sergeant.

Cornelius cut the traces of the horses who were relieved of their harness; he leaped upon one of them and led the two others to Belle-Rose and the sergeant.

"One minute," said Déroute," these gentlemen may catch a cold if we leave them in the road. The night is somewhat cool."

Aided by his comrades, he carried the officer and the guards to the carriage, locked the doors, and withdrew after having saluted them politely.

"Quick now, and you, make haste!" said he to Grippard's companions, who betook themselves to the fields.

Déroute rode rapidly along a little path, in which he was followed by Belle-Rose and Cornelius. At the end of a quarter of an hour the cavaliers perceived the sharp-pointed arrow of a chapel which was outlined in black upon a clear sky.

"A dig of the spur, and we are there," said the sergeant.

At the door of this chapel two women were waiting, immovable and full of anxiety.

"This is the hour, and I hear nothing yet," said one of them.

"My God!" said the other, "save him, and let me die."

Each of them heard the pulsations of her heart; their eyes did not quit the path except to turn toward heaven.

In the chapel a priest was praying near an altar. Suddenly the echoing gallop of several horses was heard. The two women sought to pierce the darkness with their eyes; soon they perceived three cavaliers, and recognized the one who galloped at the head.

"Saved!" they exclaimed, and by a spontaneous movement they threw themselves into each other's arms.

Presently the three cavaliers arrived; Genevieve snatched herself from Suzanne's arms.

"Farewell!" said she; "be blessed, madame, you who have saved him."

Suzanne wished to detain Genevieve; so much resignation mixed with such a profound grief touched her.

"Let me go, madame," said Genevieve, in a dying voice; "he loves you, be happy."

She entered the chapel and made some steps; but, overcome by suffering, she fell upon her knees behind a pillow. Belle-Rose leaped from his horse and found himself in the arms of Suzanne.

"Free! both of us free!" she whispered to him.

Belle-Rose pressed her to his heart and glued his lips to her chaste forehead. But already Déroute and Cornelius had gone behind the chapel to get some English horses of which the Irishman knew the speed.

"To horse," said the sergeant, "each word robs us of a league."

"Yes, Jacques, fly," added Suzanne.

"Me, fly!" said Belle-Rose; "I am going to the camp."

"Ah!" said Déroute, "it would be shorter then to return to the Bastile."

"But I shall be heard, I shall be judged!"

"And be shot," interrupted Déroute; "however, if it is your idea, leave, I follow."

Cornelius intervened; but Belle-Rose would not have yielded if Suzanne had not implored him to fly for the love of her. Then she entered her carriage, and took the road to Paris.

Meanwhile Genevieve had remained kneeling in the shadow of the pillar; she was praying with hands clasped. At this moment the gallop of several horses was heard as they moved rapidly away. Genevieve concealed her head between her hands.

"Lost! my God! lost!" said she, and made her way to her carriage.

"Where must I take you, madame?" asked the coachman.

"To the Carmelites!" answered Genevieve.

CHAPTER XXX.

A SCENE UPON THE OCEAN.

At the moment when, thanks to the intervention of Déroute and Cornelius, Belle-Rose was quitting Villejuif, eleven o'clock struck at the neighboring convent. They fled like bullets, glued to the saddles of their horses. Déroute slapped his fingers against the palms of his hands imitating the noise of castanets. It was a habit he had contracted on seeing some Spaniards dance in Flanders, and which was a demonstration of his joy. The honest fellow, who rarely smiled, had a face expanded like a tulip; but all his gayety fell on learning that they were going to England.

"To England!" said he. "Why the devil are we going to England?"

"But," said Cornelius, "I have friends over there."

"Are your friends English?"

"And what the devil do you wish them to be?"

"I should prefer them to be something else."

"Hello, comrade!" exclaimed Belle-Rose, "you forget the nationality of Cornelius."

"No! Monsieur O'Brien is from Ireland, and Ireland is a French country which the good God, through mistake, let fall into the sea. That is a point in geography which I will sustain against all the world. Let us go to Spain."

"It is too far."

"Let us go to Lorraine."

"It is too close."

"Then let us go to Flanders."

"It is a sure means of falling again into the claws of Monsieur de Louvois."

Déroute did not consider himself beaten and was going to propose Holland when Belle-Rose stopped him.

"Ah!" he said to him, "what evil has England done you?"

"None."

"Then what objections have you to going to England?"

Déroute was short of reasons; but when Belle-Rose was no longer looking at him he scratched his ear and murmured, in a low tone:

"All the same, I do not like England."

Cornelius had tied to the croup of their horses some uniforms, which the three cavaliers put on at the first wood they came to upon their route.

"We shall be taken for gentlemen going on a mission," said he, buttoning up his coat.

"It will not be believed," said Déroute, "that those who escape travel under the dress of those who pursue."

And urging on his horse, he threw himself in front like an outrider. They traveled thus during three or four relays. The gold which Madame de Châteaufort had obtained for her diamonds brushed aside every difficulty. At Noailles Belle-Rose's horse made a start to one side and fell. Déroute leaped down, but Belle-Rose had already risen.

"Eh, captain, you are not hurt?" exclaimed the sergeant.

"No, but the horse seems to be limping."

Déroute examined the animal's legs.

"He has left two inches of flesh upon the the king's highway," said he, "you will have to make a league or two on foot."

"Eh, but," said Belle-Rose, addressing himself to Déroute, "how pale you are yourself."

The sergeant stamped the ground violently.

"Hold," he murmured, "you may ridicule me as much as you please, but your fall has stopped my blood from circulating. Some misfortune is going to happen to us."

"What is it that you expect?" said Cornelius.

"Faith, monsieur, when England is in front of one and

the king's men behind one, one has indeed the right to tremble a little. It is a presentiment which I have."

Belle-Rose, who was readjusting his saddle, shrugged his shoulders.

A little more than half the distance had been crossed, when, on reaching Nouvion, Cornelius' horse stumbled against a stone and fell down. At this place the road was rough; the Irishman bruised his hands and knees; he wished to rise and could not make a step; he had a sprained ankle. Déroute pulled out a handful of hair.

"You were right, my poor friend," Cornelius said to him, "the misfortune has come to pass."

"Please God that it is the only one!" said the sergeant, looking in the direction of Paris.

Nevertheless, as Déroute was a man who had a practical philosophy over which presentiments had no influence, he did his best to assist Cornelius to remount his horse, and they pushed on as far as Bernay. The innkeeper of the place possessed an old carriage. The carriage was not so bad as it looked, but their progress was less rapid. At Cormont, as they arrived at the summit of a hill, Déroute, who was always looking behind him, saw in the distance a whirlwind of dust; a flash of light came at times from this whirlwind. A gust of wind suddenly swept the road. Déroute rose in his stirrups, and shading his eyes with his hand, he threw a rapid glance over the group of cavaliers who had just been unmasked. In a second Déroute was at the carriage door.

"Bouletord is coming," said he, in his tranquil voice.

Belle-Rose grabbed his pistols.

"Drop those playthings," said Déroute; "they would only serve to get us killed the more quickly. If we were on horseback, we might try them; but in a carriage, it should be a different method."

"Better to be killed than retaken!" exclaimed Belle-Rose.

"Better still to be saved."

"What do you wish to do?"

"You are going to see."

Déroute ran to the horses drawing the carriage and led them into an untraveled road, taking care to turn their heads in the direction of Bouletord. A cut of the whip made them leap upon a declivity, against which the carriage overturned.

"Good!" said he, "we are now going to throw ourselves behind this wall, the captain and myself. As to you, the

gentleman from Ireland, whom Bouletord does not know," he added, turning to Cornelius, "you will run to the police and ask them to come to your aid. It is sufficient to ask them to be sure that they will do nothing. Quick, they are coming!"

All this had taken less time in the doing than it has taken in the narrating. Belle-Rose and Déroute squatted behind the wall, and Cornelius, who had grasped the sergeant's idea, ran toward Bouletord. The police came up at a gallop, Bouletord at the head. His face was red and his eye inflamed.

"Hey! monsieur," exclaimed Cornelius, as soon as he was in hearing distance, "an awkward postilion has just overthrown my carriage. Can you not aid me to raise it?"

Bouletord looked in the direction of the carriage. The horses had their heads turned in his direction; he had no suspicion.

"We shall see on returning, my gentleman," said he; and he passed like a thunderbolt with his men.

Belle-Rose and Déroute leaped from their hiding-place. Déroute laughed with all his heart.

"Decidedly," said he, "this poor Bouletord is not made for the trade he exercises; he is a lamb."

"Let us push on," said Cornelius.

"No. If Bouletord is a lamb as regards intelligence, this lamb has ears. At the next relay, they will tell him that they have seen neither carriage nor cavalier, he will turn back, and he will surprise us in the very middle of the road; it would be a bad ending for a good beginning."

"Déroute is right," said Belle-Rose; "let us permit Bouletord to keep on and let us take to the left."

Now, after the escape of Belle-Rose in the environs of Villejuif, this is what had happened: The reader knows that the police officer and his two acolytes had remained in the carriage, the doors of which had been carefully locked. Two or three hours after, some market-gardeners passing along the road heard groans coming from this abandoned carriage; they broke in the panels and delivered the prisoners. Bouletord, mad with anger, immediately asked the officer if he was not going to set out in pursuit of the fugitives. The officer, stupefied by the adventure, could hardly make answer; it was necessary to see, to wait, to inform one's self. Bouletord manifested a keen impatience.

"Well!" said he to the officer, "give me your commission and I will go alone."

The officer drew his commission from his pocket; Bouletord snatched it from him and took his departure. Bouletord knew Monsieur de Louvois by reputation; with such a minister success was a sure passport to approval. At the moment of the flight, Bouletord had remarked the direction which Belle-Rose and his friends had followed. The road they had taken led to Ivry. A good woman who was gathering grass for her cow had seen three cavaliers flying in the direction of St. Mandé. At St. Mandé a child who was robbing an orchard had heard the noise of their flight over the route to Charonne; at Bagnolet they had stopped at a blacksmith's who had drawn a nail from a horse's shoe. Thus, from village to village, Bouletord had arrived upon the route to St. Denis.

"They are going to England!" he said to himself.

The commission, signed by the minister and sealed with the seal of state, made him obeyed by the police; he took men in each city and left them at the next. The accident which had happened to Belle-Rose and also to Cornelius caused him to recover the ground which they had gained at first. At Cormont, Bouletord reached the fugitives; we have seen how he passed on by them. Belle-Rose was scarcely three or four leagues from the sea; the only thing now was to reach some fishing hamlet where they could find a bark in which to cross the channel. The carriage advanced rapidly. As they reached the summit of a hill, Cornelius, who was looking before him, exclaimed: "The sea! the sea!" But at the same moment Déroute, who was looking behind, exclaimed: "Bouletord! Bouletord!" The sea beat against the shore at one or two leagues from the hill; Bouletord was coming up at full speed. Déroute leaped upon the horses and stopped them.

"Quick! get out!" he exclaimed.

In three strokes of the knife he had cut the traces. Belle-Rose and Cornelius were already in the road; the bridles and bits were all that was left upon the horses, and the two officers, mounting bareback, followed Déroute who was flying at full speed. The sun was about to set; the sea was rolling its golden waves, and on the horizon were seen white sails like wings of birds; in the distance roared the great billows which beat against the coast. Turn by turn the fugitives looked at the sea, where their safety lay, and at Bouletord in hot pursuit of them. Bouletord had seen the carriage; the action of the travelers had caused them to be recognized; just as Belle-Rose and Cornelius were leaving at a gallop, a cry of rage burst

from the brigadier's lips; he plunged his bloody spurs into his horse's sides and passed beyond his whole troop at a bound. It was a wild and furious race. The foam flew from the red nostrils of the horses; their flanks were stained with drops of blood; Belle-Rose and Cornelius pricked them with the points of their swords; Bouletord flew like a stone hurled from a sling. But Belle-Rose and Cornelius were some distance ahead, and Déroute, who preceded them by a hundred steps, was shortening the space which separated him from the sea. The pursuit had lasted for a quarter of an hour, and the horses were gradually weakening, when on turning a hillock, at the foot of which a road passed, they saw the sea laving with its waves the gray sand. Déroute applied the whip to his horse and arrived like a thunderbolt upon the shore. A floating bark, raised by the mounting tide, was balanced upon the crest of the waves.

"Whose bark?" said he, on setting foot upon the shore.

"Mine!" said an old fisherman wearing a brown cloak.

"Open your sail to the wind; here are two gentlemen who are being pursued. Do you wish to save them?"

The old sailor and his son leaped into the bark and cut it loose. Belle-Rose and Cornelius, carried on by the impulse of their speed, plunged into the water which splashed around their horses. In a bound they threw themselves into the bark; the sail swelled under the evening wind, the prow turned toward the open sea, and the boat floated lightly over the waves. At this moment Bouletord reached the shore and looked around him; no bark was there. His men surrounded him; Bouletord saw a musket in the hands of one of them, snatched it from him, and directed it at the fugitive boat. The black silhouette of the three passengers was outlined upon the horizon, where the sun had just disappeared like a king in a bed of purple and of gold. The gun remained immovable for a moment as if it had been sustained by a marble hand, then there was a flash of light and the lead whistled. A cry came from the bark, and one of the three shadows fell with outspread arms. A smile of feverish joy illuminated Bouletord's face.

"This time I have not lost everything," said he.

Belle-Rose was extended at the bottom of the boat; the ball had entered slightly above his right breast. Cornelius, paler than the wounded man, had thrown himself on his knees beside him and was seeking to stanch the flow of blood. Déroute said nothing; his countenance was mourn-

ful. He looked at Belle-Rose with a frightened air; then all at once, leaning over him, he touched the wound with his convulsive fingers.

When his hand was reddened he arose, and shaking the dripping blood in the direction of Bouletord, he exclaimed, in a terrible voice:

"Blood shall pay for blood!"

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE DARK SIDE OF THE PICTURE.

After having seen Belle-Rose take, in company with Déroute and Cornelius, the road to England, Suzanne had directed her course toward Paris. She felt certain of bringing Monsieur de Louvois to better sentiments in respect to Belle-Rose, felt certain of obtaining, not his pardon—since he was not guilty—but his justification, and all along the route she created a thousand gilded chimeras which recalled to her the girlish hopes which had so often intoxicated her in the park of Malzonvilliers. When she entered her hotel in the Rue de l'Oseille, Claudine, who was impatiently waiting for her, seeing her so radiant, threw herself into her arms. The two friends embraced each other, and during the night they had interminable conversations filled with innumerable air castles. The morning surprised them as they were still occupied in these sweet dreams, when all at once the heavy hammer of the door fell upon the iron button. The two friends trembled and clasped each other close. A lackey came to warn Madame d'Albergotti that an officer of Monsieur de Louvois' household was below who asked the privilege of speaking to her. Suzanne and Claudine grew pale, above all Claudine, for whom the name of minister was the symbol of inexorable power and obstinate vengeance. But Suzanne pressed her hand.

"Monsieur de Louvois knows everything, but Belle-Rose is out of reach. Stand up, Claudine, and let us show this officer that the *fiancee* and sister of an officer have no fear."

Monsieur de Louvois' envoy was introduced and requested Madame d'Albergotti to follow him at once to his master's.

"It is for an affair," said he, "which suffers no delay."

"I have an idea of what it is," Suzanne answered him, "and I am ready to follow you."

A carriage was at the door bearing the arms of Monsieur de Louvois. Suzanne took her seat within and the coachman drove away. The horses went at a pace to prove that the orders of the Secretary of State were precise. They arrived at the minister's hotel in five minutes; the officer showed Madame d'Albergotti to Monsieur de Louvois' apartment and announced her. Monsieur de Louvois was pacing his room with contracted lips and sparkling eyes; he stopped from time to time before the chimney to drink at pleasure from a great jugful of water, for he had already contracted that habit, which twenty years later was to cost him his life. At Madame d'Albergotti's name he turned quickly toward the door and made three steps toward the young woman.

"I have learned everything, madame!" he said to her.

"It is a care with which I intended to charge myself during the day," replied Suzanne, "I regret that another has anticipated me."

"My informant is the police officer whom your accomplices have bound, maltreated, and imprisoned; an officer of the king, madame."

"When one tortures an officer of the king, monseigneur, one can well imprison one of the king's police," said Suzanne.

Monsieur de Louvois broke the blade of a penknife which he was holding between his fingers.

"This may lead you farther than you think, madame," said he.

"Not always farther than the king knows."

"The king is in Flanders, and I am at Paris; the king is the king, and I am his minister!" exclaimed Monsieur de Louvois.

Suzanne was silent; she began to understand that her action might have results which she had not even suspected; with a minister like Monsieur de Louvois, no one was sheltered from his anger, neither the old man, the child, the weak, nor the powerful. But these dangers which she now divined, Suzanne would have braved if she had known them. She resigned herself, then, and waited. Monsieur de Louvois threw his penknife upon the floor.

"I am grieved, madame," said he, in a brusque tone, "but you will have a severe account to render of all this."

"I am your prisoner, monseigneur."

"I know it, and it is an awkward action you have committed."

Suzanne looked at the minister with an astonished air.

"Eh, madame," continued Monsieur de Louvois, "the best thing you could have done, since you wished to deliver Belle-Rose, was to have left with him."

"I am not yet his wife, monseigneur."

"I thank you for these scruples, madame; they have served me more than I hoped for. You will take the place of Belle-Rose. The punishment must follow the crime."

"But of what crime do you speak, monseigneur, and what crime have I committed, then?" exclaimed Suzanne, indignantly. "I know of but one crime in all this, and that one was committed in the Bastile upon the person of an innocent officer. Now this officer is my betrothed, I love him, and why should I not try to save him? Go, monseigneur, it is evident that you have never loved, and all your power as a minister, great though it is, does not go so far as to prevent a woman from devoting herself!"

Monsieur de Louvois' countenance was frightful to see; anger swelled in his heart like a tempest, and he employed all the energy of his will to repress it.

"And I will show you," he exclaimed, with a terrible outburst, "that my power goes so far as to avenge myself on those who dare brave me. No one has ever done it with impunity, madame. Truly you do not know to whom you speak. What! an officer of fortune, who is not even a gentleman, has rebelled against my authority, has made himself the instrument of a man whom I hate, has thwarted me in my designs, and I shall not punish him! And you who came to solicit his unmerited pardon—you employ your time in securing his escape, you have triumphed and you come to say similar things to my face. But, in truth, it is folly, madame!"

Monsieur de Louvois had risen and was pacing the room. Suzanne looked at him, silent and resolute.

"And do you believe," resumed the minister, that if Madame de Châteaufort had not placed an insuperable barrier between her and myself, I had not punished her like you, duchess though she is? You have surrendered yourself; woe to you!"

"You threaten me, monseigneur, and I am a woman!" said Suzanne, tranquilly.

Monsieur de Louvois bit his lip till the blood came. He sat down before his table and struck the papers which were lying upon it.

"No, madame, I do not threaten, I act You have saved Belle-Rose; but Belle-Rose is not yet out of the kingdom."

"He will be out of it to-morrow."

"That is what I expect Bouletord to tell me."

At this name Madame d'Albergotti grew slightly pale.

"Oh!" said the minister, "the police officer whom your friends accommodated so well has told me all. They have gone, but Bouletord is upon their track. Let a horse fall, and they are lost."

Suzanne shivered.

"Eh! madame," continued the pitiless minister, "pray that their horses may fall into some hole if you attach any importance to your liberty."

"Monseigneur, I am only attached to him," said she.

Monsieur de Louvois rang, and an usher entered.

"Go, madame, and await my orders," said he; "and you," he added, addressing himself to the usher, "ask Monsieur de Charny to pass into my room."

Madame d'Albergotti arose, saluted Monsieur de Louvois, and went out, leaving the minister alone with Monsieur de Charny, who had just entered. This new-comer was a little personage whose monkish face and crafty glance inspired a sort of repugnance which one could not overcome. Godefroy Charny, or Monsieur de Charny, as he was commonly called, without any one being able to explain the origin of his nobility, was the minister's adviser and favorite. His influence over Monsieur de Louvois was extreme; it came to him above all from the rapidity of his resolutions and the perseverance of his enmities. When Monsieur de Louvois asked him his opinion, Monsieur de Charny never hesitated and always advised the doing of the most extreme thing. Monsieur de Charny was nothing and was everything; he was hated and he was feared; no one associated with him, but every one took care not to offend him. Monsieur de Charny dressed in a very simple fashion. For the rest, polite and insinuating—one of those men capable of killing without staining their cuffs and with hat in hand.

"Did you see that woman who went out as you came in?" Monsieur de Louvois said to him.

"I saw her; she is pretty and of distinguished appearance."

"That woman has braved me, and I wish to punish her."

"It was sufficient to say to me, monseigneur, that she had braved you; the rest became useless."

"I will probably charge you with the care of my vengeance."

"I am yours, monseigneur."

While Monsieur de Louvois was talking with Monsieur de Charny, the usher to whom Madame d'Albergotti had been confided took her to a room in which there was already a gentleman. At sight cf a woman who seemed to belong to the court, the young man arose from his seat. Suzanne looked at him, and it appeared to her that she had seen this face somewhere; but owing to the agitation into which she had been thrown by her interview with Monsieur de Louvois, she could not recall either in what place or under what circumstances.

"Eh! madame la marquise, I am glad to meet you," exclaimed the young gentleman all at once.

Suzanne examined her interlocutor more attentively and finally recognized Monsieur de Pomereux, who, at the time when she was still unmarried, had passed some days at Malzonvilliers. She bowed and extended her hand to Monsieur de Pomereux, who kissed it. Monsieur de Pomereux was not altogether what he was at the epoch when he had been a suitor for Suzanne's hand. Upon his face were to be seen the traces of a dissipated life, but, from certain movements of his physiognomy, it was easy to see that the debauchee could still recollect that he was a gentleman.

"From what I can see, you come from Monsieur de Louvois' room," said he, leading Madame d'Albergotti to a seat.

"You are not deceived."

"If I can serve you in any way, use my credit, madame; I have the honor to be slightly related to Monsieur de Louvois."

"Well, monsieur, your relative is making preparations to send me to prison."

"You!" exclaimed Monsieur de Pomereux, stupefied.

"Myself."

"It is impossible! I shall fly to the minister——"

"It is useless. It appears that I have committed a great crime."

"What is it?"

"I have procured the escape of one of my friends who had the honor to be treated as a prisoner of state."

"Diable!" said Monsieur de Pomereux, "it is an ugly affair."

"So it seems to me now."

"Monsieur de Louvois is not precisely tender on such occasions."

"Let us admit that he is not at all so."

"I willingly agree with you, and it is precisely that which disturbs me. You must keep out of prison, madame."

"I agree with what you say, but that is not the sentiment of Monsieur de Louvois."

"So it appears, and unfortunately Monsieur de Louvois is very obstinate. But, madame, you are not alone in the world, you have——"

"I am a widow, monsieur," said Suzanne.

"A widow!" exclaimed Monsieur de Pomereux. "Faith, madame, it is your fault if you are one. But," he hastened to add, on seeing Suzanne making ready to reply, "I have no rancor, and I place all the credit I possess at your disposal."

Madame d'Albergotti was going to reply when an usher entered to inform Monsieur de Pomereux that Monseiur de Louvois was expecting him in his cabinet. Monsieur de Louvois was signing some papers when Monsieur de Pomereux entered. Monsieur de Charny had just left.

"Sit down," the minister said to him; "I have chosen you for an important mission, and you must leave at once."

"I accept the mission and will leave when you wish."

"That is how I like to hear you talk."

"But you will permit me to say a few words to you about an affair which concerns a lady in whom I am much interested."

"Her name, if you please?"

"The Marquise d'Albergotti."

"Do you know what she has done?"

"Perfectly."

"And you have the audacity to interest yourself in her?"

"Parbleu! I have come near marrying her."

Monsieur de Louvois could not keep from laughing.

"That is a fine reason!" he exclaimed.

"Only her consent was necessary for her to become my wife."

"It would have been so much the worse for you."

"Why?"

"Because if she had been your wife, I hardly know what you would have been."

"Hey!"

"Your *protegee*, my cousin, is very much in love with a certain scoundrel named Belle-Rose."

"That is romantic!"

"This Belle-Rose was on his way to the citadel of Châlons when she procured his escape in the direction of Villejuif. The police officer has been locked up in the carriage, and the prisoners have taken the horses."

"That was not so awkwardly done."

"You think so! Well, I think that so beautiful a feat deserves its recompense. I imprison the mistress until I get possession of the lover."

"What good will you accomplish by that?"

"My cousin, I am only a poor minister, but I have every reason to believe that when he learns that she is in prison, he will return, I shall entrap him, and we will proceed to hang him."

"And I tell you he will not return. What kind of an idea do you possess of the captains and marquises of this time? The captain no longer thinks of her now, and the marquise will no longer think of him to-morrow."

"That is your belief."

"Parbleu!"

"Then it would not displease you too much to marry her."

"Me!" said Monsieur de Pomereux, in surprise.

"Yes, you, and to explain myself more clearly, would you have, monsieur, any repugnance to marry the marquise in whom you are so much interested?"

"My faith, though marriage is a pitiful thing, in consideration of Madame d'Albergotti, I will commit this folly."

"And you have no fear of Belle-Rose?"

"Not at all!"

"Well, Madame d'Albergotti's pardon is at this price; let her marry you, and I forget her fault."

"Agreed! Madame d'Albergotti has some fortune, and I have always had some taste for her."

"See to it, then, that Madame d'Albergotti comes to a decision, or she will have to remain in a convent the rest of her life."

"She shall not go to the convent."

"Are you quite sure of it?"

"We are no longer in the time of pastorals, monseigneur."

"You are going to make a test of the fact."

Monsieur de Louvois called an usher and gave him an

order to go and bring Madame d'Albergotti. In a few minutes Suzanne entered.

"Since we separated, madame," Monsieur de Louvois said to her, "I have made a reflection. I wish, in consideration of your extreme youth, to forget the fault of which you have rendered yourself guilty."

"Ah!" thought Suzanne, "already it is no longer but a fault; just now it was a crime."

"But," continued the minister, "I attach one condition to this favor. Monsieur de Pomereux, an acquaintance of yours I believe, has been charged by me with informing you as to what that condition is. I leave you. Monsieur le Comte will bring me your reply; I desire it to be such that I can set you at liberty immediately."

Monsieur de Louvois withdrew, and Monsieur de Pomereux and Suzanne were left alone.

CHAPTER XXXII.

A PROPOSAL OF MARRIAGE.

After the departure of Monsieur de Louvois, the Comte de Pomereux, on seeing the great eyes of Suzanne fixed upon him with an expression of astonishment and inquietude, understood that the mission with which he had charged himself was more delicate than he had thought at first. But Monsieur de Pomereux was not a man to recoil before any enterprise; the most extravagant were precisely those which pleased him most. So he proceeded to impart to her the intentions of Monsieur de Louvois.

"You have heard the minister," he said to her; "your fate is in your own hands, madame."

"That is to say, monsieur, that it is still between his, since he attaches a condition to it."

"To tell the truth, madame, I have obtained from my illustrious cousin more than I hoped for, but in a different manner from what I should have desired."

"Explain yourself, please."

Monsieur de Pomereux was silent for some moments.

"My faith, madame," he all at once exclaimed like a man who takes his part, "I believe the simplest way is to come out with it plainly."

"That is also my opinion, monsieur."

"Well! madame, it is Monsieur de Louvois' will that you marry me."

Madame d'Albergotti grew red as a strawberry and uttered a slight cry.

"Yes, madame, that you marry me!" repeated the count, bowing.

"But it is a piece of folly!" exclaimed Suzanne.

"For you, madame, I am of that opinion; but permit me to believe that it is nothing of the kind on my side."

"Is it quite seriously that Monsieur de Louvois has spoken to you, monsieur?"

"The most seriously in the world."

"He wishes me to be your wife?"

"Or me to be your husband, whichever you prefer."

"And that is the only condition which he has attached to my liberty?"

"The only one."

"Pardon me, monsieur, if I insist," said Suzanne, "but will you inform me if this proposition comes from Monsieur de Louvois himself."

"Certainly, madame, it is an audacity which I would have never had."

"It appears at least that you approve of it."

"I humbly acknowledge it. When the door of paradise is open to you, one does not close it."

"This is the language of the court, and you forget that I am almost in prison."

"Let me believe that you will never be there."

"I see, monsieur," replied Suzanne, gravely, "that your cousin, Monsieur de Louvois, has not told you everything."

"On the contrary, madame, he has told me everything," said Monsieur de Pomereux, with a smile.

Suzanne looked at him with frightened eyes.

"He has told you that I was affianced to him whose flight I have protected?" exclaimed she.

"Yes, madame."

"That I loved him?"

"Yes."

"That he loved me?"

"Yes."

"And you have consented to marry me?"

"Yes."

"Oh! you lie!" exclaimed Suzanne, rising with a face purple with indignation.

"Not at all; it seems to me that I say to you the most

natural things in the world," replied the count, with an unalterable *sang-froid.*

"Monsieur," said Madame d'Albergotti, sitting down again, "we must come to an understanding. I have told you——"

"Do not trouble yourself to begin again; I am going to repeat to you what you have told me. You have a *fiance;* this *fiance,* who is the fugitive pursued by Monsieur de Louvois' men, loves you, which is quite simple, and you love him. You are going to swear to me that you are determined to love him always, and that on his part he will take care never to forget you. Is that it?"

"Perfectly."

"You see, then, that I have heard everything."

"And notwithstanding these avowals, you still persist in wishing me for your wife."

"Upon my word, madame, it is my chief desire."

A bitter smile passed over the lips of Suzanne, who drew back her seat and gathered her dress around her with a gesture of crushing scorn.

"Is it possible, madame, that you have seen so little of the world that my proposition astonishes you?" continued Monsieur de Pomereux.

"It does more than astonish me, monsieur; it afflicts me."

"Eh! my God! madame," exclaimed the count, with a surprised air, "what is there, then, so afflicting in the desire which I have to marry you? You are such that half the ladies of the court are jealous of you; I am a gentleman, we are both young. What is there more simple?"

"Since all this is more serious than I thought at first, I will answer you seriously, monsieur. When my father served as guide to my youth, I made the sacrifice of my hand, but to-day that I am free, the hand will not give itself without the heart. Now the heart is already given, monsieur. I have nothing more to say in answer to the proposition which you have transmitted to me in the name of Monsieur de Louvois. My life and liberty are his; my love is my own."

From Madame d'Albergotti's air, Monsieur de Pomereux understood that he no longer had anything to hope for; but he drew from this certainty the desire of triumphing over a resistance which, to tell the truth, he had not expected.

"In faith, madame," said he, with a smile, "perhaps

you are wrong, and your refusal exposes you to a danger which you did not expect."

"What is it, monsieur?"

"That of seeing me fall in love with you."

Suzanne shrugged her shoulders.

"Eh! madame, you need not ridicule the idea. If you had married me, you would perhaps have escaped this peril, but you are not sure of avoiding it now."

"If it is a peril, acknowledge at least that Monsieur de Louvois will take care to place me where it cannot reach me."

"And that is what vexes me. Prison for prison, in your place, I should have preferred marriage. It is a Bastile from which one sometimes escapes."

Suzanne stopped Monsieur de Pomereux with a gesture.

"So be it," said he. "You are now between my cousin's claws; but it shall not be said that I attempted nothing for your deliverance; the thing interests me a little now, and I shall put everything to work to set you free again."

An hour later Monsieur de Louvois called for Monsieur de Pomereux.

"Well," he said to him, as soon as he perceived him, "have we made the citadel capitulate?"

"Eh! parbleu! one is almost sure of triumphing over a woman, and you send me to a phenomenon. 'Pon my word, Heloise, of faithful memory, is not worthy, in my opinion, to lace Madame d'Albergotti's corset."

"In short she prefers the prison or the cloister to your person."

"You see how humiliated I am by it. It is a very bad example for the court, and you cannot imprison her too soon."

"I will take care of that," replied Monsieur de Louvois, writing some words upon a paper.

Monsieur de Louvois' accent as he said this made Monsieur de Pomereux tremble, although he was not easily moved. He threw a look of pity toward the door of the cabinet occupied by Suzanne, and went out.

Immediately after Monsieur de Louvois had a moment's conference with Monsieur de Charny.

"Well, she refuses Monsieur de Pomereux. The convent is still left us," said Monsieur de Louvois, placing his signature at the bottom of a letter which he had just written.

"Bah!" said the confidant, "a cell is preferable to a bier."

Soon after, an usher came to inform Madame d'Albergotti

that it was time to leave. The marquise arose and descended to the court of the hotel, where she saw a carriage bearing the arms of the minister. The gentleman who had conducted her that morning to Monsieur de Louvois' was waiting for her. It was Monsieur de Charny. At sight of that pale and cold visage, Madame d'Albergotti shivered; she turned aside her eyes and leaped, without taking his hand, into the carriage, in which Monsieur de Charny sat down soon after. The coachman cracked his whip, and the carriage rolled away.

"Where are you taking me, monsieur?" Suzanne asked Monsieur de Charny.

"To the Convent of the Benedictine Nuns in the Rue du Cherche-Midi."

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE CONVENT IN THE RUE DU CHERCHE-MIDI.

The Convent of the Benedictine Nuns in the Rue du Cherche-Midi was then one of the convents of Paris most renowned for the austerity of its discipline. It was a great square building, surrounded by vast and beautiful gardens, which formed for this religious exile a verdant rampart filled with cool retreats and shady paths. But in the midst of this fresh and smiling park the convent, with its white walls and gray roofs from which no noise escaped, had a mournful aspect which chilled the heart. It was like a great tomb in the midst of flowers. At the name of Monsieur de Louvois, the door opened; Madame d'Albergotti and her guide descended from the carriage; Suzanne was taken to a little room, whose sole furniture was a wooden bench, an image of Christ, and a prie-Dieu, and Monsieur de Charny was introduced into the parlor, where the superior was waiting for him.

"Wait here some moments, madame," said Monsieur de Charny to Suzanne, on quitting her; "I am going to recommend you to the special kindness of the superior."

Madame d'Albergotti bowed without replying. The voice of this man congealed the blood in her veins. The letter of which Monsieur de Charny was the bearer was conceived in clear and precise terms. As soon as she had become acquainted with its contents, the superior respectfully saluted the minister's envoy.

"Assure Monsieur de Louvois," said she, "that his in-

structions shall be observed; I know too well what the house of which I have the direction owes him to fail therein."

"Madame," replied Monsieur de Charny, "this letter must have told you that Monsieur de Louvois had in some sort confided to me the guardianship of the person whom he sends you. His intention is that she shall take the vail in two or three months, unless she submits to his will before that time."

"She shall take it, monsieur."

"She is obstinate, and unfortunately inclined to worldly things. Of course you will treat her kindly, for it is in your pious and soft character, madame; but temper this extreme kindness by a little firmness. Believe me, she will the more readily find the road to safety."

Monsieur de Charny spoke some minutes still in this tone, then withdrew, not without profound reverences. At the end of a quarter of an hour, Suzanne heard the carriage which had brought him rolling away. She gave in thought a last adieu to the things of life, and followed a sister who came to seek her.

The superior of the Convent of Benedictine Nuns, who was called, between the walls of the convent, Mother Evangélique du Cocur-de-Marie, had been known in the world as Madame de Riége. She was a creature of Monsieur de Louvois.

"My daughter," said she to Suzanne, with a pale smile, "Monsieur de Louvois, who wishes you well, informs me that he has chosen our house for your retreat. On the threshold of this pious house die the noises of the world. Rejoice, my daughter, that you have come here."

"I would rejoice, madame, if I had come here of my own free will; but I have been brought here by force, and I imagine that this house is, for me, a sort of Bastile."

Mother Evangélique bit her lip; but she continued, more softly:

"You are not in a prison; this is the house of God, and you are under the protection of the holy mother of Christ. You are young, my daughter, and subject to the illusions of the world. But one learns in our profound peace to regret nothing, and I hope that you will one day enter the holy flock of which God has confided to me the direction. Adieu, my daughter."

The superior withdrew, and soon after a sister came to take Suzanne to the room which was destined for her. While these things were transpiring at the convent in the

Rue du Cherche-Midi, Claudine was awaiting, in a mortal inquietude, the return of Suzanne. The hours passed away, and Suzanne did not return. Toward noon, not having seen or heard anything, Claudine, no longer being able to contain herself, left the hotel and ran to Monsieur de Louvois'. By force of questioning the ushers who went and came in all directions, she learned that Madame d'Albergotti had left in a carriage with a gentleman belonging to the retinue of Monsieur de Louvois. This news was not of a nature to diminish her fears. What did they wish to do with Suzanne? where had they taken her? The court was full of all sorts of people going and coming, at every minute a carriage left or arrived with great noise, the lackeys were playing dice while waiting for their masters; no one paid any attention to Claudine. The poor girl, overcome by weariness, finished by sitting down upon a little bench in a corner, where she began to weep. She was about to dry her eyes, something which she had done already for the tenth time, when she was drawn from her isolation by a voice which called her. Claudine raised her head and recognized Corporal Grippard. In her present state of agitation the kindly face of Grippard appeared to her the best and most amiable face she had ever seen.

"Oh! my God!" said she, "it is heaven which sends you."

"In faith, mademoiselle, I will go to burn a taper for the saint which brings me this good fortune," replied Grippard, with a military grace which on any other occasion would have made Claudine smile.

"Monsieur Grippard," said the young girl, "you must come to my aid; at first I did not know what was to become of me."

"Eh! my God! you say this to me with a singular air; what, then, has happened to you?"

"You do not know, then? Suzanne has been carried off."

"Suzanne!" repeated Grippard, with a surprised air.

"Yes; Madame d'Albergotti."

"The lady who, with my friend Déroute, has employed herself to procure my captain's escape?"

"Yes."

"And who the devil can have taken it into his head to commit this beautiful action?"

"Monsieur de Louvois."

"Oh!" said Grippard, with a frightened air.

"You are going to aid me to find her again?"

"I am perfectly willing, but what can a poor devil of an ex-corporal do in opposition to a minister?"

"All the same, you will aid me."

"With great pleasure; Captain Belle-Rose is a brave soldier who has not punished me every time that I deserved it; this lady whom you call Madame d'Albergotti has served him all in her power; well, ventrebleu! I will serve her with all my strength."

"It is first necessary to know where he has been taken," said she.

"We will find out by ferreting in that great barrack of a hotel; I will find some comrade or some lackey who is acquainted with the ushers or clerks. I have good legs and my tongue is not too bad, as you will see."

"As soon as you learn the place of her retreat, you will come and inform me of it?"

"Parbleu! since it is for you, I will ask it."

"And you will not lose a minute?"

"Not a second."

Claudine returned to the hotel in the Rue de l'Oseille, a little less troubled than she was when she had met Grippard. Grippard was a conscientious man, who performed loyally all that which he promised; unfortunately he had more loyalty than intelligence, and he rarely succeeded in things which required a certain amount of cunning. He installed himself before Monsieur de Louvois' hotel and bravely set to work to question the lackeys, the ushers, and all the employees who circulated there. He was standing there, looking for a new face to question, when he perceived Bouletord descending the grand stair-way with a radiant air. The brigadier had one hand upon his hip, and with his other hand he was curling his mustache. Never had his hat been placed so awry, never had his sword so proudly beaten his legs, never had his boots been planted so squarely upon the pavement; he was a man who wore an air of triumph from head to foot. Grippard had seen Bouletord on the day of the expedition to Villejuif, but Bouletord had not seen Grippard who was disguised. The corporal did not hesitate, and resolutely accosted his comrade.

"Good-day, brigadier," he said to him.

"Quartermaster, if you please," replied Bouletord, with a superb air.

"Ah! diable! you are advancing, it seems."

"It is Monsieur de Louvois whom I have just seen who

has named me to this position. He will not stop at this. The minister knows how to appreciate my services."

In pronouncing these words Bouletord seemed to be stifling in his uniform; he spoke in loud tones and turned his eyes in all directions to see if any one was looking at him. Grippard had enough sense to understand that this man only asked to be questioned in order to reply. He proposed to him to go and drink a bottle or two together, and the quartermaster accepted, in the double hope of refreshing himself and having an auditor.

"Therefore," said Grippard, when they were seated before the table of a neighboring cabaret, "you have seen the minister."

"As I see you; he has given me twenty louis and has told me that I was a brave man whom it was necessary to push."

"You have performed all sorts of courageous deeds, then?"

"Only one, but it was worth a thousand."

"What was it?"

"I have killed Belle-Rose."

Grippard let fall the glass which he was holding to his mouth.

"Oh! when I say killed, I am not altogether sure of it; but he must be dead by this time. I have placed a ball at this spot in him," added Bouletord, placing his finger upon Grippard's doublet. "See what one gains," continued Bouletord, who took his comrade's silence for admiration, "by struggling against us. The man is almost dead and the woman imprisoned."

"What woman?" asked Grippard, with an innocent air.

"Eh! parbleu! Madame d'Albergotti. She is in a convent."

"What convent?"

"Faith, I do not know. It is a convent like all convents. Visitandines, Visulines, or Benedictines—what difference does it make?"

"That is true," said Grippard.

Bouletord was beginning to get tipsy; he quitted Madame d'Albergotti and returned to Belle-Rose; at the end of a quarter of an hour he had narrated six times the history of the shot. It was more than Grippard wished to hear; he paid his reckoning and ran to Claudine.

Claudine came near dying of despair on hearing the narrative of the poor soldier. Twenty times she made him

repeat the same discourse and interrupted him at each moment by her sobs.

"Perhaps he is still alive," she finally said.

"What do you count on doing?"

"To leave for England."

"I do not know how to make you the offer," said Grippard, "but it seems to me that you would do well to permit me to accompany you. I have been a corporal in your brother's company. It is quite simple."

"I accept," she said to him; "we will leave to-morrow."

Monsieur de Louvois had no sooner learned the news of the supposed death of Belle-Rose than he sent for Monsieur de Pomereux. He informed him of Belle-Rose's death and gave him a letter to the superior of the convent in the Rue du Cherche-Midi. Monsieur de Pomereux went at once and was received by Madame d'Albergotti in the parlor. The same emotion which had seized the gentleman at their first interview at Monsieur de Louvois' made tremble his heart at sight of Suzanne. She had, as she saluted him, a smile so sweet and such a chaste mixture of reserved affability, that he was touched by it.

"Do you bring me good news?" she said to him.

"Alas! madame," Monsieur de Pomereux replied, "I come on the part of Monsieur de Louvois."

"That is to say that the news is not good."

"Perhaps you are right. I wish that we were in the time of the chevaliers of the Round Table in order to have the right to come to deliver you lance in hand; unfortunately, madame, the police are in the way; but there is another means of leaving here."

"Again!" said Suzanne, in a half laughing, half serious tone.

"Eh! madame, believe that if I mention this proposition, it is more in your interest than in mine. You are delivered, and I am enchained."

The brusque tone of this repartee made Madame d'Albergotti smile.

"Must I thank you?" said she.

"Hold, madame, let us speak seriously," replied the count; "it has been such a long time since this folly has happened to me, that I can indulge it for a few moments. I feel attracted toward you by a sympathy which you will call by what name you please, but which is sincere; your future frightens me, you do not know what kind of a man my dear cousin is. When passion dominates him he is capable of anything. You and Captain Belle-Rose have

wounded his pride as minister; the wound is incurable. You know what day you have entered this convent; do you know what day you will leave it? Are you quite sure that Belle-Rose will ever return? Between you there is the sea and the minister's anger, madame! Do you wish to make of this cloister your tomb? First leave, marry me, and you can live afterward as you chose. If I displease you too much, our gracious monarch will furnish me the occasion to get killed in his service. At any rate you will be free and out of these stifling walls."

Madame d'Albergotti saw that Monsieur de Pomereux spoke seriously this time. She extended her hand to the young man, who kissed it respectfully.

"Thanks, monsieur," she said to him; "you have a kind heart. In repulsing you it is not Monsieur de Pomereux whom I repulse; it is marriage with another than Belle-Rose. I have plighted my faith to him; let him die or live, I shall keep it. I do not hide from myself the perils to which the rancor of Monsieur de Louvois exposes me. These perils will not be stronger than my resignation. You have understood me, monsieur; let this be final between us."

Monsieur de Pomereux bowed. What he had still to say strangled him; he wished to conquer his emotion and could not. He leaned over Suzanne's hand and kissed it again with a respect which was not habitual with him.

"You are a noble creature," said he.

Monsieur de Pomereux called for the superior; she came, and he asked her to communicate to Madame d'Albergotti the news of which he was the bearer; after which he went out in all haste. As he was traversing the inner court, he heard a heart-rending cry. His heart leaped in his breast.

"My God!" he murmured, "I believe that if thirty women had not shared my affections, I would finish by loving this one."

CHAPTER XXXIV.

A WHITE NIGHT.

The cry which Monsieur de Pomereux had heard was indeed the cry of Suzanne when she had learned the supposed death of Belle-Rose. Mother Evangélique had coldly announced it to her, and Suzanne, overwhelmed by this blow, had fallen upon the carpet. The superior called two

sisters, who transported her to her room, where she remained several hours without giving any sign of life. When she awoke as from a long sleep, the tears were streaming from her eyes. Toward evening, her distracted soul clung to a hope, which in the night of her despair, shone like a star. It seemed to her that, in her cruel narration, the superior had vaguely expressed a doubt concerning the reality of Belle-Rose's death. It might also be a false piece of news prepared by Monsieur de Louvois. Suzanne resolved to wait before taking any determination, but the blow had been terrible, and when she appeared next day at prayers, it might have been believed that she was a ghost coming from the tomb. Three days passed in this anguish which exhausted her. On the fourth day, Suzanne was informed that Monsieur de Pomereux was in the parlor and desired to speak with her. Suzanne's first thought was to refuse this interview, but she changed her mind and went down. Monsieur de Pomereux hardly recognized her, so profound was the transformation which she had undergone.

"Madame," he exclaimed, "you are killing yourself."

"Despair is not suicide," she replied.

"Mordieu! madame," said the count, "it shall not be said that I let you die. Belle-Rose is not dead."

Suzanne's joy was so keen that she tottered and came near falling; tears burst from her eyes and she began to sob like a child without knowing what she was doing. When Suzanne had grown somewhat calm, she raised a face in which shone a smile bathed in tears.

"Thanks!" she said to him, "you do not know what a relief your words give me."

"Eh! parbleu! I suspect it slightly from the pain which I suffer."

"Are you quite sure he is not dead?"

"Yes, I am quite sure of it."

"From whom does your information come?"

"It comes from my cousin, who has received it from England, where Captain Belle-Rose now is.' '

"But perhaps he is dangerously wounded?"

"To speak to you frankly he has a ball in his breast. Ah! you grow pale! Come, the wound is not mortal. Diable! I have seen people cured who were pierced through and through. In six weeks he will be as sound as ever."

"Do you believe it?"

"I give you my word upon it. Monsieur de Louvois has been informed of the adventure by Monsieur de Charny, a

devil of a man who has agents everywhere; he has received news of it from Dover, where the fugitives have disembarked. Monsieur de Louvois has torn up the dispatch; he begins to believe that the captain has some amulet which protects him."

"It is the justice of his cause which defends him, monsieur."

Monsieur de Pomereux's visit gave back to Suzanne the calm which she had lost, and full of courage, now that Belle-Rose was alive, she had faith in the future. There was in the convent a young girl whom her family were trying to induce to take the vail. She had been Suzanne's friend during those somber days when she was grieving over Belle Rose's supposed death. A tender affection had sprung up between them. Gabrielle de Mesle might be seventeen or eighteen years of age; she was slender and white like a lily, and blonde like those portraits of the Virgin which one sees in churches. One night as Suzanne was asleep in her room, she was drawn from her sleep by light sighs which came from the foot of the bed. She opened her eyes and saw, in the dim light of a night-lamp, a white form which was seated at her feet, immovable and stiff like a statue. Though she was naturally courageous, Suzanne shivered and felt an icy sweat bathe her temples; she arose to get a better view of the phantom. As she leaned forward, she recognized Gabrielle, who was looking at her with dilated eyes. The poor girl's head was bare, and her long hair descended to her breast; she was half clothed in a peignoir which floated around her form and gave her the appearance of a shadow. Her teeth chattered behind her white lips.

"I am afraid," said she, extending toward Suzanne her suppliant hands.

"I am going to die! I am going to die! My God! save me!" cried Gabrielle.

These words, and still more the accent with which they were spoken, filled with pity the heart of Suzanne. She let Gabrielle's head rest upon her shoulder and called her by the softest names.

"You are a little fool, calm yourself," said she; "are you not near me? What do you fear?"

"Oh!" said Gabrielle, "I feel that I am dying a little each day. This night I have seen my sister calling me in a dream. She, too, is dead. I have awakened bathed in a cold sweat; I felt her humid and icy breath; I have closed

my eyes and ran here more dead than alive. She was in a convent, my poor sister; she never left it."

Gabrielle pressed her face to Suzanne's breast and sobbed grievously.

"And you have no relatives?"

"Relatives! Oh! I have several of them, perhaps too many of them. We were rich, so rich that several envied us! It is horrible! horrible!"

Gabrielle trembled from head to foot.

"It was my mother who died first, beautiful, young, and adored; she grew pale one day, then suffered the next, then went to bed; she complained some days longer and never rose again. My sister loved no one in the world but her. This death rendered her mad; she went to a convent, there she suffered as I am suffering, and she only left it to go to the cemetery with a crown of white roses upon her forehead."

"Poor girl!" murmured Suzanne.

"Is it of me or of the dead you speak?" said Gabrielle; "our destiny will be the same. A brother was left us, an adorable child six years old, frank, joyous, with rosy lips and eyes like flowers. Poor Henri! one morning he awoke with the pallor of marble upon his forehead; his lips were blue, his skin dry and hot; he threw his arms around my neck, telling me that his breast was on fire; at noon his little hands were already cold, and when evening came he was dead!"

Suzanne pressed Gabrielle to her breast.

"You are astonished," said the young girl, in a hollow voice, "but you have understood nothing, then? You know nothing?"

"What?" said Suzanne, with affright.

"We were rich; others wished our wealth. They will get it—I alone am left."

And in low tones she added:

"Poison is in France, poison is everywhere; it is in the heart of families, it is in the water we drink, in the fruit we eat, in the flower which we caress, in the perfume we breathe. It is the invisible, infallible enemy; it devours France; it is in the heart of the kingdom; it is the master, despoiler, and king. It is my fortune they wish—am I not the last heir? Let them keep this fortune, I shall take the vail. I am afraid to die at seventeen. My God! I should like to live."

Tears sprang from Gabrielle's eyes; terror, fever, and

despair tortured her. Finally, overcome by so many emotions, she ended by closing her eyelids and going to sleep near Suzanne.

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE RENUNCIATION.

The nocturnal confessions of Gabrielle had drawn her and Suzanne more closely together. At the end of three weeks it seemed as if they had always known each other. Nothing could change Gabrielle's resolution; she was driven at the same time by fear and despair. As soon as her intention to take the vail was known in the convent, the superior ordered the hastening of all the preparations for the ceremony. The family was notified, the friends invited, and the day chosen. Gabrielle's noviciate was not terminated, but a dispensation was obtained from the Archbishop of Paris, and nothing any longer stood in the way of her pronouncing the vows. Gabrielle's misfortune had turned aside Suzanne's thoughts from their natural course. She forgot her own troubles at the sight of so much youth allied to so much grief. An unexpected visit obliged her to recall them. The evening before the day on which Mademoiselle de Mesle was to renounce the world for devoting herself to God, Madame d'Albergotti was informed by a sister that Monsieur de Charny was waiting for her in the parlor.

"Already a month has passed, madame," Monsieur de Charny said to her, saluting her respectfully, "since Monsieur de Louvois regretfully sent you to the convent, where he would certainly not have sent you if reasons of state had not constrained him to do so."

"If the regret was as keen as you say, monsieur, it seems to me that the minister could readily rid himself of it."

"Ah! madame, how little you know the harsh laws which power imposes on those who exercise it! Above the minister's will, there are reasons of state; Monsieur de Louvois hoped at least that the atmosphere of this place would induce you to take the vail. But, in defect of profession for that, he has even pushed kindness so far as to make you an offer of entering his family; you have refused everything."

"Not being the ward of any one, I have the right, I imagine, to think of my own establishment."

"Certainly, madame, and Monsieur de Louvois would regret to thwart your intentions; but still the care of the kingdom requires you to take a determination."

"The care of the kingdom, monsieur—those are big words for so insignificant a person as myself!"

"The enemies of the king utilize everything, madame. If you knew to what unjust attacks eminent men are exposed, you would see all this affair under a different light, and would no longer accuse Monsieur de Louvois, who wishes you well. But if you continue to refuse His Excellency's good offices, he will be forced to take new measures which will assure at the same time your repose and that of the state."

"Tell monseigneur le ministre that I am ready to suffer everything, but that I am not ready to give way to anything."

"Madame," replied Monseiur de Charny, saluting Madame d'Albergotti, who had already risen, "I shall have the honor to see you again in a month, and I shall pray God that your resolutions may be changed by that time"

At dawn the following day the bells of the convent in the Rue du Cherche-Midi rang a full peal. The ceremony of taking the vail was a religious solemnity quite frequent at the time when this story transpires, but which did not fail to attract a great crowd on each occasion. A great number of the ladies and gentlemen of the court were to be seen there, and on this day pomp replaced silence and profound meditation in the chapels and cloisters.

When Mademoiselle de Mesle entered the chapel it was filled with a brilliant assemblage of people. A sad and soft murmur welcomed her; she was so beautiful that every one pitied her. She wore upon her blonde hair a crown of white flowers, pearls were attached to her neck and jewels to her arms, belt, and dress. She traversed the church with a firm step, accompanied by Mother Evangélique and another nun. Monsieur de Mesle and the members of his family followed her. When she had mounted the steps which separated the nave from the choir, the ceremony began. The Archbishop of Paris officiated. Gabrielle knelt down upon a velvet cushion and prayed. The chapel was full of perfumes and flowers; the organ gave forth the sweetest airs; sisters concealed in a tribune mixed their celestial voices with the accords of the instrument; it was a divine

harmony that charmed the ear and lulled the heart. When mass had been celebrated, the work of renunciation began. A sister detached the flowers which decorated the forehead of the young *fiancee* of heaven, and let them fall upon the marble; another untied the pearl necklaces and diamond bracelets; and the jewels, which recalled the vanities of this world, strewed the slabs of the choir; the knots of ribbon were untied, and Gabrielle's luxuriant hair was scattered over her naked shoulders. A ray of sunshine, gliding through the windows, enveloped her bowed head with an aureole and played in the floating tresses of her long blonde hair. A sister took them in her left hand, and with the right she cut off the curls, which soon covered the dress and cushion. The archbishop raised the cross toward heaven, and with his extended fingers blessed the crowd; the sisters prayed in chorus, and the organ rolled forth its waves of sound. When the last curl of hair was cut off, Mother Evangélique threw a vail over Gabrielle's head, the songs burst forth, and the grated door of the choir fell back upon its hinges. Gabrielle no longer belonged to the world.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE LAST HOUR.

The day after Gabrielle had taken the vail, Suzanne encountered Monsieur de Charny upon the terrace of the convent; Monsieur de Charny made her a profound salute. Suzanne bowed and passed on. The sight of this man inspired her with an invincible horror, and caused her to shudder like a child who has stepped on a serpent. On her awakening the following morning she found upon one of the chairs in her room a complete novice's outfit; the dress, the vail, the chaplet. Her clothing of the evening before had disappeared; some one had entered during her sleep and carried it off. Suzanne hesitated a moment before dressing herself, but it was not in her character to revolt for small things. To the wretched annoyances of which she was the object, she opposed unceasingly a calm forehead and a pious resignation.

Since the day on which Mademoiselle de Mesle had taken the vail, her health, already bad, grew constantly worse. Each morning Suzanne was frightened to notice the change

in her; her cheeks became more hollow, the bluish circle which framed her eyes assumed leaden tints; her wasted hands were dry and burning, there were moments when her lips had the pallor of the vail which floated over her forehead. She accepted remedies only from Suzanne's hand; but when Suzanne was not there, she poured out the liquor and smiled bitterly on seeing overflow that which was to bring some relief to her malady. One day as Suzanne surprised her emptying a vial, she snatched it from her fingers and constrained her to take what was left in the bottom of it.

"Death is here!" said Gabrielle, striking with the end her oppressed breast; "you prolong my torture by some hours."

"My God! you shall live, my poor child, you shall live!" exclaimed Suzanne, who felt herself suffocated by tears.

"And why do you wish me to live?" exclaimed Gabrielle, bursting into sobs; "am I not lost to him?"

At this cry Suzanne understood that the heart of Gabrielle was not less sick than her body. Terror and love together were killing her. Suzanne tenderly embraced her and wished to give back a little hope to that desolate soul; but Gabrielle kept a mournful silence; she shook her head and wept; toward evening Suzanne put her to bed a prey to a burning fever. She passed a sleepless night; but in the morning Gabrielle rose and was the first one to go to the chapel; a cold sweat covered her forehead and fever shone in her looks. The unhappy child displayed a frightful energy in dying. When evening came, she leaned at times upon the window and looked at the setting sun; the trees of the park were surrounded with a light vapor, the birds pursued each other in the branches, the leaves rustled, and on the horizon were to be seen great bands of light whose reflections inundated the sky with rosy light. A profound ecstasy was depicted upon the face of Gabrielle, she extended her hands toward space and said, in a trembling voice:

"My God! how sweet it would be to live if one was loved and free!"

Then she fell upon her knees, imploring death. A day came when her strength was unequal to her courage; she wished to rise at the first sounds of the bell, but her knees gave way, and Suzanne, who no longer quitted her, having raised her in her arms, placed her in bed again. The doctor came during the evening, and, having examined her, declared that she would not live through the next day.

"It is a lamp without oil," said he.

During the whole day Gabrielle had many times turned her sparkling eyes toward Suzanne, her lips had opened as if she had had something to confide to her, then her eyes and her mouth closed again, and she was heard praying quite low with hands clasped over her heart, in the austere attitude of the marble figures seen upon tombs.

When night came Suzanne was left alone in the cell where Gabrielle was dying. The silence was lugubrious; the oppressed breathing of Gabrielle had given way to a light respiration, which no longer made itself heard. Her eyelids were closed, her lips no longer moved; she seemed to sleep. Suzanne piously kissed her on the forehead like a mother who blesses her child; she was going to withdraw when Gabrielle, unclasping her hands, placed them around Suzanne's neck.

"Remain near me," she said, in a whisper.

Suzanne sat down upon the edge of the bed.

"Listen to me, Suzanne," continued Gabrielle, "I have a service to ask of you. Do you promise to render it to me?"

"I promise you."

Gabrielle meditated for a moment, then searched under the lining of her pillow; she drew forth a small box which contained a letter and a tress of hair. She unfolded the letter and pressed it to her lips; her eyes filled with tears.

"Look," said she, "my tears have almost effaced the handwriting. For three years I have been living on this letter."

"Poor child, she is dying from it!" sighed Suzanne.

"It is all that I have of his," continued Gabrielle, in a sad voice, "I have not seen him for three years, and he does not know that I am going to die."

"Oh! Gabrielle! whoever he is, if he had known this love, he would have saved you."

"He! but if he had sought me in marriage, he would have been killed! I have preferred to die!" exclaimed Gabrielle, pressing close to Suzanne.

Suzanne shivered.

"This is how this love came about," continued Gabrielle, drying her eyes. "We were in the country, on our Mesle estate, near Mantes, my father, my sister, and myself. It was the happy time. The Chevalier d'Arraines—that is his name—came to pay us a visit. He was twenty-two or three years of age; he was amiable, proud, and intelligent. The sight of him troubled me singularly, and the whole

night I could not keep from thinking of him. This trouble increased on the following days; it was mixed with unknown sensations which delighted me, and nevertheless I dared not speak of it to my mother or even to my sister. I do not know whether the Chevalier d'Arraines noticed it, but it appeared to me that on every occasion when the family was assembled together he attached himself more particularly to me. When he spoke to me, his voice was soft and charming; when he looked at me, his eyes had an expression which touched me deeply. One evening—this evening has decided my life—he met me in an avenue of the park where I went to dream all alone. On seeing him I blushed, and felt myself tremble without knowing why. He came to me and took my hand; and nevertheless I made no effort to detach myself from him. He spoke to me a long time; he said to me those things which one dares not hear and which are nevertheless engraved in the depths of the heart. When he told me that he loved me, I thought I was going to die with happiness. All at once we heard walking near us; I disengaged my hand and started to fly; but before leaving, I dared look at him; his eyes were so tender and suppliant, that if no one had been near, I should have fallen into his arms. The next day he went away," continued Gabrielle. "His father sent him to the army; but, before leaving, the Chevalier d'Arraines sent me this letter, in which he repeated to me what he had said to me the evening before."

"And since then?" questioned Suzanne.

"Since then, I have heard nothing more of him. A short time after his departure, my mother fell sick, then died; my sister followed my mother; the little child died also. Terror seized me, frightful dreams peopled my sleep; at night I awoke in surprise, bathed in tears, and it seemed to me that phantoms touched my face with their icy hands. The word convent was murmured in my ears, I was told that it was a refuge; I came here. Alas! Suzanne, you know how I will leave it."

Suzanne no longer had strength to reply; she held her friend embraced and wept over her.

"You, Suzanne," said Gabrielle, "you will leave here; one day, no doubt, you will meet Monsieur d'Arraines, happy, perhaps, and no longer thinking of me. You will tell him that you have seen me, you will show him at the bottom of this letter some words which I have written, and you will give him this tress of my hair. And then you

will tell him how I died. If he weeps over me, it seems to me that we shall not be separated forever——"

Suzanne took the box from Gabrielle's hands and concealed it under her dress. The day was about to dawn, and already the great trees were to be seen outlining their dark foliage upon the transparent sky. This long narrative had exhausted Gabrielle; she rested her head upon the pillow and closed her eyes. Toward noon, she called for the confessor. Suzanne ran to warn the superior, the bells of the convent began to sound the funeral-knell, and the sisters went to the chapel, where soon was heard the prayer for the dying. The Abbé St. Thomas d'Aquin, who was the convent's confessor, went to Gabrielle's cell, carrying the holy viaticum and preceded by a chorus child who shook a little silver bell. Suzanne opened the door to the pious procession; those of the sisters who were not in the chapel knelt in the corridor, and Gabrielle, at sight of the man of God, arose. The abbé, who was a pious and kind old man, approached the bed where Gabrielle was lying. The dying girl joined her hands and prepared for confession. The approach of death had spread over all her features an ineffable sweetness; a soft smile half parted her lips, and the virginal candor of her forehead had a grace which no longer belonged to earth. At sight of this child, who was surrendering untroubled her soul to God, the old curé understood that he had nothing to pardon.

"Speak, my daughter," he said to her, in a kindly tone; "soon you will be with Him who consoles and blesses, and you will pray for us."

Gabrielle related her life in a few words; the curé had known it for a long time; she had loved, she had suffered, she was going to die. No other noise was heard than the tinkling of the little silver bell, the distant murmur of the religious songs which floated in the air like a celestial harmony, and the stifled sobs of the young novices who were weeping around Suzanne.

"Go in peace, you who have not sinned!" said the abbé, extending his trembling hands over the bowed forehead of Gabrielle.

The holy man took up the consecrated wafer and presented it to Gabrielle. All heads were bowed. Mother Evangélique alone did not weep. Gabrielle smiled. After Gabrielle had taken the wafer, the old abbé placed in her hands a little ivory crucifix. Prayer filled the convent with its divine murmurs. Suzanne looked at Gabrielle's

face, with eyes full of affection and pressed to her breast the box in which this poor girl had placed all her heart. Through the narrow window was seen a corner of the blue sky where the light smiled; the trees shivered, and the swallows passed uttering joyous cries. The noises of the city mounted like a vague and confused sound. Gabrielle had the air of one going to sleep; her face was calm and peaceful as that of a child. Toward sunset she opened her eyes and again raised herself. Her looks sought Suzanne, at whom she smiled, then the sky. She saw the purple horizon and the yellow light which shone in the azure distance. She pressed the Christ to her white lips, stretched her arm toward the sky and fell back, dead. All the sisters rose with saddened hearts; Suzanne bounded to Gabrielle's bed and placed her trembling hand upon the young girl's breast. The heart no longer beat; no breath came from between her lips.

"Let us pray God, my sisters," said the priest, throwing holy water upon the body of her who was no more.

And everybody knelt.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

AN ENGLISH HUSBAND.

When Claudine reached England, accompanied by Grippard, she found her brother, if not out of danger, at least almost assured of getting well. The ball had lodged in his breast without injuring any essential part. The surgeon had probed the wound and believed that he could answer for the patient, unless some unexpected accident happened. Cornelius had chosen a small cottage, in a retired quarter of the city, far from the noise and agitation of the port. There was a small garden around the house. The surgeon came twice or thrice a day; and Cornelius and Déroute took turns about at the bedside of Belle-Rose. The interview of Cornelius and Claudine was intermixed with joy and tears; they had a thousand things to say to each other; but Cornelius begged Claudine to say nothing to Belle-Rose concerning the disappearance of Suzanne, saying that this news might put him in danger of death. The days flowed away sadly between these three persons. All their happiness had been marred just at the time when it no longer seemed to have anything to dread. No news

came from France; Belle-Rose recovered slowly; Grippard, who had been sent back to Paris to learn the fate of Suzanne, had not written a single time. Cornelius had Claudine to console him; Claudine had Cornelius; but Déroute had for aiding his patience only his fury against Bouletord. He passed his time in fuming like the devil, and it was a pleasant thing to see the contrast between his placid face and the horrible oaths which he heaped up from morning to evening. As Belle-Rose began to convalesce, he asked more frequently for news of Suzanne, and was astonished not to receive it. One day Déroute presented himself before Cornelius and Claudine all equipped, with great boots, a cloak upon his shoulder, a rapier at his side, and a valise under his arm.

"Monsieur," said he, rapidly, to Cornelius, like a man who does not wish to suffer any objection, "I come to ask you for your commissions as well as those of Mademoiselle Grinedal."

"Where the devil are your going?"

"To Paris."

"You will get yourself hung there."

"Bah! balls and bullets have not yet caught me, and it is not Bouletord who will do what they have not been able to do. Hold, monsieur, treat me as chicken-hearted if you wish, but my captain's complaints have wrung my heart; I will have news of Suzanne, I will know what Monsieur de Louvois has done with her, and I will save her or die in the attempt. The end of the finger or only a letter from Madame d'Albergotti are worth more for curing my captain than all those ingredients of every kind which are placed upon his wound."

Claudine and Cornelius each pressed one of Déroute's hands.

"Go," they said to him, "and may God guide you."

"Oh!" said he, with his tranquil smile, "I have good feet, good eyes, and a good sword. I shall have gone far when Captain Belle-Rose comes to join me."

"How join you? Do you wish him, then, to go and get imprisoned in the Bastile again?" exclaimed Cornelius.

"Come!" replied Déroute, "do you believe that my captain is a man to remain with arms crossed when he knows that Madame d'Albergotti is locked up in a convent? Would you detain him at Dover?"

"You are right," said Claudine, shaking her head, "Jacques shall leave."

"Eh! morbleu! I knew it well! he will leave as soon as

you inform him of it. I am going to prepare the rations."

Déroute embraced Belle-Rose, to whom he said that he was going to Paris to learn how their affairs were getting along, and left the same evening upon the boat of a fisherman, who, through national animosity, was going to take his fish upon the coast of France. While throwing his nets into the sea, he could easily throw Déroute upon the shore.

One evening, about ten o'clock, while Cornelius and Belle-Rose were talking in Claudine's presence, they heard in the street a great clashing of swords and broken cries. Cornelius grabbed his sword and ran to the door. Belle-Rose did likewise.

"Eh! Jacques, what are you doing!" exclaimed Claudine; "your wound is not yet closed."

"Is that a reason for letting people be assassinated?" replied Belle-Rose, and he descended the stair-way close behind Cornelius.

The street was obscure, it was an out-of-the-way place where there were great walls inclosing vast gardens. Just as the two friends opened the door they heard calls for aid.

"It is a Frenchman!" said Belle-Rose, and he ran toward the place from which the cries came.

At the end of the thirty steps, Cornelius and he found themselves before three or four men who were attacking another driven into the corner of an old wall. The man attacked made a buckler of his cloak rolled around his left arm and answered by rapid thrusts all those which were directed against him. Though he showed himself skillful and determined, the combat carried on in this manner could not last long. Belle-Rose and Cornelius, with swords raised, fell upon the assailants, who, seeing themselves surprised, first resisted and afterward took to flight; one of them, struck by Belle-Rose, tottered a few steps and fell upon his knees. His comrades retraced their steps, seized him, and carried him away. As Belle-Rose and Cornelius were making ready to pursue them, the stranger stopped them.

"Stop," he said to them, "I know those brave men."

Cornelius and Belle-Rose, thoroughly astonished, looked at the stranger.

"Oh!" he continued, "it is a little quarrel which we have had together; I will relate it to you, if you will kindly add to your valiant intervention the present of a glass of water.

This little fight has warmed me up, and I should not be vexed, besides, to see if the swords of those good fellows have not scratched something else besides my coat."

Belle-Rose and Cornelius conducted the Frenchman to their lodgings, where they found Claudine much disturbed and waiting for them upon the door-step. When the light in the room struck them, they perceived that Belle-Rose had his shirt and trousers all covered with blood.

"Are you wounded?" the stranger cried.

"I do not think so, monsieur; it is a recent wound which has opened again during the action.

"It is still blood shed for me," said the stranger; "blood is a tie that unites."

And he extended his hand to Belle-Rose, who pressed it. After examination, the stranger found that he had five or six scratches; his cloak, having done nearly all the parrying, was horribly torn.

"Messieurs," said the stranger, saluting, "I am the Comte de Pomereux, envoy of Monsieur de Louvois."

At this announcement the two friends exchanged a rapid glance.

"In faith, monsieur," replied Belle-Rose, "will you pardon me if I do not imitate your frankness? I am a Frenchman, like yourself, but grave motives oblige me to conceal my name."

"The arm answers for the heart," said Monsieur de Pomereux; "the rest does not concern me."

At the name of Monsieur de Pomereux, Claudine had trembled and furtively looked at him. She went about the room, preparing glasses of sugared wine and compresses; then, when everything was ready, she withdrew, fearing to be recognized by the count, who had seen her sometimes at Malzonvilliers. This might be a vexatious discovery on the part of an envoy of Monsieur de Louvois.

"Monsieur," said Monsieur de Pomereux, addressing himself to Cornelius, when Claudine had moved away, "the people of your nation—for, by your accent, I imagine that you are English——"

"Irish, monsieur," replied Cornelius.

"Exactly; I only missed it by a strait; the people of your nation, I say, have strange manners. I came near being killed because it seemed to me that certain women of this country had the impertinence to be as pretty as Frenchwomen."

"What! for that only?" said Belle-Rose.

"Eh! my God! yes. It is a supposition of which I know

the right or wrong. Now, being at Dover, waiting for a dispatch from our embassador at London, I came across one of these Englishwomen who would not have been out of place at the court of our great king. I was growing very weary, and, to pass away the time in a useful manner, I employed my mind to penetrate to the lady's domicile."

"Always for the study which interested you?" said Cornelius.

"Always, monsieur. I succeeded therein, and I was able to convince myself that the ladies of the good city of Dover know how to appreciate that little merit which I have acquired at the court of our glorious monarch. It was a discovery which was about to reconcile me to England, when the husband—for there is a husband, messieurs——"

"There is always a husband," observed Belle-Rose, whom the pleasant humor of Monsieur de Pomereux diverted.

"Oftentimes there are even two of them; the known and the unknown, who is at times the cousin. Here there was only one, but he was doubled by two brothers and a brother-in-law. I do not know who made to all of these relatives reports concerning the honesty of my relations with the lady, which were all for the love of science. The husband spread the rumor that he was going to leave for London; and while, confiding in his word, I went to introduce myself into the lady's home, he attacked me with the aid of his relatives. Had it not been for you, messieurs, I would have been left on the field."

"That would have been unfortunate for science," said Cornelius, gravely.

"It is a monstrous proceeding, monsieur!" exclaimed the count, with a comic indignation. "It is one of those things which are not permitted in France. Ah! fie! to wish to kill a man because he pays court to your wife; but there is no security here for lovers. What! a man pretends to leave, even goes away, then returns by stealth, hides behind a wall, and when the lover comes tranquilly forth, all at once pounces upon him, storming and swearing, in order to massacre him. It is a savage, barbarous, Mussulmanic proceeding!"

"It really is," observed Cornelius. "A well-informed husband would have extended a ladder to assist you in climbing to his balcony."

"Oh! pardieu! I did not ask so much of him, and I would have been satisfied if he had only remained tranquil."

"That is honest."

"The fact is that my coat is all slashed as a result of it. A coat which I had brought expressly from Paris, and one which has no counterpart at Dover; this calls for vengeance."

"Bless me!" said Cornelius, "if he has spoiled your satin, I have every reason to believe, from the color of your sword, that you have slightly spoiled his flesh. It seems, then, that you are quits."

"Faith, monsieur, you do not much esteem satin cut in the most gallant fashion. And then, the gentleman whom monsieur struck," added he, turning in the direction of Belle-Rose, "will certainly recollect the adventure."

"I am enchanted to have come to your aid," said Belle-Rose, "but I should much regret to have killed him."

"Oh! fear nothing, he is the husband. This sort of Englishman is very tough. After all," continued Monsieur de Pomereux, "the adventure has this good side—it will determine me to pass over to France. I am cured of Brittanic good fortune; here the only way to love is with a dagger in the hand. I shall return to Paris and get married."

"You?" said Cornelius.

"Parbleu! I shall be, upon my word, a marvelous husband. It is a marriage which I have contracted a taste for because the lady does not wish it. It is Monsieur de Louvois' way."

"Ah!" said Belle-Rose.

"He is a minister who mixes a little in everything. He has had the triumphant idea of giving me for wife a lady whom he has placed in a convent."

At these words, Cornelius pricked up his ears.

"That is pleasant," said he.

"Yes, it is a little vengeance of my magnificent cousin. It appears that the lady has for *fiance* a certain Belle-Rose who has escaped from prison."

It was Belle-Rose's turn to tremble.

"Belle Rose!" he exclaimed.

"You know him?" asked the count.

Cornelius pressed Belle-Rose's knee in order to constrain him to be silent.

"Oh!" said he, "I have known him in Flanders, when he was sergeant in the regiment of La Ferté."

"Sergeant!" repeated Monsieur de Pomereux, with a

disdainful air. "Ah, come! what sort of a man is he, then?"

"A man almost of my stature and my air, who handles the sword passably well, and who passes for a very honest soldier."

"Ah! ah! and it is this gentleman who has made himself loved by Madame d'Albergotti?"

"She still loves him, then?" exclaimed Belle-Rose, in a voice filled with emotion.

"Does she love him? Say, rather, that she adores him. It is incredible that women should have such ideas. I who speak to you, a count, a relative of Monsieur de Louvois, and who will have a regiment some day, have been refused by Madame d'Albergotti."

"Noble heart!" said Belle-Rose, in a low tone.

"Ah! you think so!" said Monsieur de Pomereux, who had heard him. "Well, faith! I have done like you—and what is stranger, it is that I have come to esteem her much. Yes, upon my word. She has appeared to me so simple, so chaste in all things that I have fallen unreservedly in love with her."

"Ah, bah!" said Cornelius, who pressed Belle-Rose's arm.

"Faith, 'tis true, or almost so. The duse! I am a gentleman, and I do not wish her to die in a convent."

"She shall not die there," said Belle-Rose, in a deep tone.

"That is also my opinion," said Monsieur de Pomereux; "unfortunately it is not the opinion of a certain Monsieur de Charny, to whom my precious cousin has committed the care of this affair."

"Monsieur de Charny?" repeated Belle-Rose.

"A certain rascal capable of everything, venomous as a viper, and tenacious as glue. When he is in conference with Monsieur de Louvois, I am always afraid for some one."

"But what harm has Madame d'Albergotti done him?"

"Him? nothing; but Monsieur de Charny is a man who shares the hates of the minister as one does those of a mistress."

"What a wretch!" said Cornelius.

"He is a wretch such as is necessary, they say, to the viziers given us by the caprice of our gracious monarch; mute as the tomb, ready at any hour, impenetrable as night. Eh! messieurs! these scoundrels have their uses.

For the rest, thanks to my relationship with our illustrious minister, he is to some extent my friend."

"Monsieur de Charny?"

"Eh! my God, yes. Only, when he does me the honor to eat at my table, as soon as he is gone I have thrown out at the window all that he has touched," replied Monsieur de Pomereux, rising.

He arranged the knots of his ribbons, readjusted his cloak, took up his felt hat, which he had placed upon a piece of furniture, and extended his hand to the two friends.

"I am going to France, messieurs," he said to them; "recollect that if ever you have need of a purse or a sword, whatever the occasion may be, day or night, far or near, the Comte de Pomereux places himself entirely at your disposal."

As he pronounced these words the count saluted Cornelius and Belle-Rose with a grace and a nobility which made the two friends conceive a better opinion of his character. When he had withdrawn, Belle-Rose called Claudine.

"Sister," he said to her, "we leave to-morrow."

At the gesture which she made, Belle-Rose interrupted her by a word:

"I know all."

"Yes," continued Cornelius, "Monsieur de Pomereux has related everything to him."

"Then you knew it and did not say anything to me!" said Belle-Rose, with an accent of reproach.

"Death was hovering over you—could we speak?" said Cornelius.

"And even now," added Claudine, "you are scarcely able to walk."

"I would have to be nailed up in a coffin to stay here!" exclaimed Belle-Rose.

The accent of his voice and the expression of his face permitted no objection.

"It is understood," said Cornelius; and he added, leaning toward Claudine: "Déroute knew what he was talking about."

The preparations were soon made. They packed clothes in a valise, procured themselves some coarse wearing apparel, placed gold in a belt, provided themselves with arms, and they found next day one of those hospitable fishermen going to fish upon the coasts of France, who consented to take the three young people with him. It was a good action which brought him in ten pounds sterling.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

THE SIEGE OF THE CONVENT.

Belle-Rose, Cornelius, and Claudine arrived at Paris without any startling adventure. They had disguised themselves so as not to be recognized, and the very audacity of their enterprise protected them. It was almost impossible that Monsieur de Louvois should suppose for one moment that Belle-Rose would dare present himself so soon in France. When Belle-Rose entered Paris, Déroute had already been there fifteen days. The honest sergeant had not lost time. After having prowled around Monsieur de Louvois' hotel, questioning the people who might give him some information concerning the object of his researches, he understood the usefulness of this espionage. So many carriages left the court at every hour of the day and night that the neighbors, seeing them all, did not recollect any particular one of them. Déroute turned his batteries in another direction. The prowess of Bouletord, who had made such advances in the minister's favor, ought, perhaps, to render him the messenger of private commissions. Déroute was so successful as to promptly discover the quartermaster, and no longer quitted him. During three days he traversed the half of Paris, following close upon the heels of Bouletord; but Bouletord, who stopped a little everywhere, did not stop before any convent. Déroute began to ask himself if he would not do well to wait for Bouletord at the corner of some passage, and to force him to confess his secret with a poniard at his thrcat, when one evening Grippard, who had also attached himself to Bouletord, in company with whom he paid a visit to all the cabarets of Paris, came all out of breath to inform him that Bouletord was to carry a dispatch the next day to one of the convents of Paris.

"I have it!" said Déroute, embracing Grippard.

Early the next morning he was at the door of Bouletord's barrack, dressed as a lackey. When Bouletord went out, Déroute placed himself on his track and only quitted him at the door of the convent in the Rue du Cherche Midi. This convent had an immense extent; its garden even stretched as far as the Rue de Vangirard on one side, and on the other occupied the grounds over which the exterior boulevard has come later on. Déroute

went around the convent; the walls were high, thick, and impenetrable, but Déroute had set out to see what could be seen, even if he did not penetrate inside the convent.

"If Madame d'Albergotti is in the convent, she must sometimes walk in the gardens; let there be a little corner where I can conceal myself, and I will manage to see her," he said to himself.

As he was still speaking, he spied a high house provided with a garret, the window of which gave upon the gardens of the convent. The distance which separated the gardens from this window was great; but Déroute had the eyes of a lynx. He ran to this house and knocked. It was an old woman who opened the door.

"Madame," Déroute said to her, "you see what I am from my dress; I am in the employ of some honest people who live near here, in the Rue de Sèvres. My employers are in the country, the house is being overhauled, and while waiting for the completion of the task, I am looking out for a room which I can occupy. I have money, madame, and I pay in advance."

Upon which Déroute slipped two crowns into the old woman's hand.

"This comes in just right," replied the old woman; "we have a pretty cabinet to rent which will suit you wonderfully well."

This pretty cabinet was a frightful hole, but Déroute affirmed upon his honor that he had never seen such a charming retreat and so well furnished with all the commodities of life; he was astonished that such an apartment could be rented for two crowns. The old lady then withdrew, and the honest sergeant having carefully bolted the door, ran to the post of observation. He remained at the window till nightfall and returned the next day at dawn; he only quitted it to swallow a piece of steak which the old woman had prepared for him and which he declared the most succulent in the world. This proceeding lasted three days. Déroute had seen thirty or forty nuns and twenty novices, but not one of them resembled Madame d'Albergotti. Finally, on the fourth day, he perceived a nun whose figure made him tremble at the first step she made upon the terrace. The sergeant leaned out of the window and clapped his hands. The nun turned around, and he recognized her perfectly. To see her was an easy thing—but it was a question of getting her out of the convent. This is what Déroute employed his imagination to do. He began by dispatching his aide-de camp

Grippard to Bouletord, with a mission to get himself received in the police. It was an honest means of penetrating the secrets of the quartermaster, and to be forewarned in case there was any plot to carry off Madame d'Albergotti to some other convent. As to himself, he resolved to enter the house of the Benedictine nuns as a gardener. He was at this point in his projects when Belle-Rose, Cornelius, and Claudine arrived. Déroute had taken care, on leaving, to give Cornelius an address where he could find him; it was an inn in the Rue des Bourgeois-St. Michel, at the sign of the Roi David. Déroute went there every evening under divers costumes, and passed an hour or two there in seeing the frequenters of the place play cards and dice. The evening on which Cornelius entered the hostelry of the Roi David, he had some difficulty in recognizing the sergeant, who had on a black wig and a magnificent beard. Belle-Rose was waiting in the street.

"I know where she is," Déroute said to him, as soon as he perceived him; and he related what he had done.

Belle-Rose embraced him.

"There are three of us," said he; "neither bars, walls, nor doors, nor locks can stop us."

It was first necessary to make arrangements for taking a lodging where importunate visits were not to be dreaded. Belle-Rose at once named Monsieur Mériset.

"I have been there too often for them to think of looking for me there," said he.

And they all took the way to the Rue du Pot-de-Fer St. Sulpice. On seeing Belle-Rose, Monsieur Mériset witnessed great surprise.

"And the Bastile?" he murmured, in a stifled voice.

"Well, what of the Bastile?"

"You have gone there?"

"And I have left it."

"Quite sure?"

"You see for yourself," said Belle-Rose, laughing.

"Yes, yes, it is indeed you. But pardon my hesitation; there are people skillful enough to assume all sorts of figures."

"Certainly."

"This dear Monsieur Belle-Rose—I am delighted to see him again. So you come to lodge with me?"

"Yes, my good Monsieur Mériset. Where shall I find a better host. But, you understand, for special reasons I desire not to be known; you will not name me."

"I understand," said Monsieur Mériset; "it is again for affairs of state."

"As you wish. It is agreed, is it not?"

"The house is yours."

Déroute had taken care not to give up the cabinet where he had established his observatory. It might be a means of establishing communications with the interior of the convent, as soon as it could be made known to Suzanne that her friends were seeking her. Belle-Rose's impatience did not permit him to wait; he set out to invest the place the very next day. The plan of the campaign was the invention of Claudine. She dressed like an Irishwoman, and mounting the carriage with Cornelius, she had herself taken to the convent in the Rue du Cherche-Midi. Cornelius, who was from Connaught, spoke English almost as well as if he had been from Middlesex. Claudine had quickly learned the tongue of her betrothed, and she already spoke it with ease. They arrived before the door of the convent, where, after having rang, they were received by the attendant.

"Will you," Cornelius said to her, with an English accent too pronounced not to be affected, request the superior to kindly come down to the parlor."

"Is it for a pressing affair?" asked the attendant.

"You will say to her that it is a question of a young lady, whom her brother, an Irish gentleman, intends to leave at the convent, where, if she chooses, she can renounce her rank."

At these words the attendant bowed, and, making the two strangers sit down, disappeared through a little door which opened upon a gallery.

"This is the way we must introduce ourselves," said Claudine, quite low to Cornelius, when they were alone; "you are my brother, your name is Sir Ralph Hastings, and I am Miss Harriet Hastings, your sister; I am seized with a great devotion which leads me to enter a convent."

After a moment the attendant came back and showed Claudine and Cornelius into the parlor. The superior was there.

"I have been informed of the object of your visit to this holy house," said Mother Evangélique; "we never refuse to open our arms to hearts which wish to consecrate themselves to God."

"I thank you, my mother," replied Claudine, in a sweet voice which seemed to come from an English mouth.

"You will be sheltered here from the snares of the world. This is a house in which peace reigns."

"My sister has the wish," said Cornelius; "I will not hide the fact, madame, that her family and myself have opposed it a long time."

"It is to stand in the way of the Lord, my son."

"That is what I have understood later on, and to-day I no longer desire to turn her from her project. I have set aside the part which falls to her from her mother's estate, and this shall be her dowry; there is, in all, eight thousand pounds sterling."

"Eight thousand pounds sterling?" repeated Mother Evangélique.

"Eight thousand pounds," continued Cornelius, negligently, "this makes a round sum of two hundred thousand francs."

"We never look at the dowry," said the superior; "the heart is the only wealth which the Madonna desires; but this money will aid us in doing good."

The conversation continued upon this footing some moments still; after which Cornelius, drawing from his pocket a purse in which there were almost fifty louis, asked the superior to accept it for distribution as alms.

Claudine did not feel any joy in penetrating the interior of the convent; she looked everywhere to see if she could not perceive Suzanne; but, on this day, she had to content herself with the pleasure of simply sleeping under the same roof. Suzanne did not appear in the refectory. But the next day, at the morning prayer, she recognized Suzanne among the novices. She was kneeling with her companions upon the marble, and her forehead was bowed over her clasped hands. Claudine wept over her prayer-book. Presently the ceremony came to a conclusion, the last songs died under the sonorous vaults; Claudine abandoned her chair and went to where the nuns passed along, followed by the novices. Suzanne was one of the last of the procession; as she passed before Claudine, with forehead lowered and hands crossed over her heart, Claudine lightly touched with the end of her fingers the long dress of Madame d'Albergotti; Suzanne turned her eyes and encountered the brilliant glance of Claudine, who had one finger upon her lips to command silence. The procession pushed Suzanne forward, she continued her silent walk; but this morning she did not leave the chapel without blessing God. Suzanne did not stay in her cell on this day. About noon she descended to the garden and traversed the

walks nearest the entrance door. At the end of a quarter of an hour she met Claudine, who was walking by the side of a nun. They exchanged a glance and passed on.

The next day Claudine went to the gardens unaccompanied by any one. As soon as she saw Suzanne, she plunged into the most somber part of the gardens where the shade of the elms was thickest. Light steps were heard behind her, and Suzanne ran up to her with extended arms. The two friends embraced each other with tears in their eyes.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

THE GARDENER'S NEPHEW.

After the first effusions of a mutual affection which absence had increased, Suzanne took Claudine's hands in hers.

"Come, Claudine, hide nothing from me; Belle-Rose——"

"Would I be joyous if he was not here?" exclaimed the young girl.

"Here!" repeated Suzanne, who became pale with happiness.

"We are all here; my brother, Cornelius, Déroute, and our poor Grippard also; it is a conspiracy."

"Tell me about it quickly."

"I will, but not here."

Claudine took Suzanne's arm and went to the center of the park, where there was an arbor from which they could escape in case of surprise.

"Now the enemy can come," said Claudine, sitting down.

Suzanne had the details repeated twenty times; but Claudine finally interrupted her.

"You cause me to lose precious time," said she; "it is first necessary to deliver you."

"That is quite difficult! I have so many enemies who hate me!"

"But you have so many friends who love you!"

"I have four of them."

"Do you know many people who can say as much?"

"Pardon me, Claudine; liberty with you would be happiness, and I have suffered so much that I no longer believe in it."

"I leave to Jacques the care of making you believe in it,

and it is a care of which he will willingly acquit himself. But let us no longer speak of this; in what part of the convent are you lodged?"

"In the right wing; you can see my room from here. Down there at the end."

"It is twenty feet from the ground."

"Almost."

"If need be you can descend with your bed-clothes tied together?"

"I believe so; but there are dogs."

"Castor and Pollux."

"Ah! you know them?"

"I know everything."

"Then you know that they are turned loose at night."

"Perfectly. Do you recollect mythology, Suzanne?"

"A little."

"Well, we well treat Castor and Pollux as Cerberus was treated. Our friend Déroute will take care to provide himself with a quarter of lamb."

"But after the dogs, there are the gardeners."

"We will put them to sleep."

"And then the walls."

"We will cross them."

"And there is still Monsieur de Louvois."

"We will laugh at him."

"And Monsieur de Charny."

"Oh! he is a man who will do well not to present himself before our friend Jacques."

"Stay, Claudine!" said Suzanne, who had not been able to pronounce the name of the minister and that of his favorite without shuddering, "if this attempt should make Jacques meet the least danger, I would prefer to take the vail and die here."

"And if you should have to remain at the convent only fifteen days longer, Jacques would prefer to enter the Bastile and never leave it."

"Poor friend!"

"Come!" said Claudine, "let us come to an understanding. Cornelius comes to the parlor every two days."

"It is rather often."

"Quite true. He informs me of the projects which Belle-Rose, Déroute, and himself have combined; while they act on the outside, we act on the inside; I get possession of Sister Assumption's keys, and familiarize myself with Castor and Pollux, we leave every day some gold-pieces in

the hands of the gardeners; and, on the day fixed for the escape, we are ready."

"Ah! my God!" exclaimed Suzanne, all at once, "Mother Scholastique!"

"Save themselves who can!" replied Claudine, turning her head in the direction of the nun.

One took one direction, and the other the opposite one.

While Suzanne and Claudine were conspiring inside the convent, Déroute was not losing any time outside. He pushed at the same time Grippard's entrance into the police force and his own into the gardens of the good sisters. The same day as that on which took place Suzanne and Claudine's conference, the half of his wish was realized; Grippard came to surprise him at the hostelry of the Roi David in his uniform as member of the police force.

"Ah!" said Déroute, "you have succeeded, then?"

"It was necessary, as I had sworn it."

"You are obstinate, I can see."

"As a Breton, though born in Picardy. But I have had some trouble about it."

"Really!"

"Since the Villejuif affair, Bouletord has become as suspicious as a monk. I have had to make four attempts before succeeding."

"So much trouble to obtain this ugly uniform as all that!"

"It has cost me thirty bottles of the best Argenteuil, seasoned with lies and hams."

"Ah! you lie, also?"

"Sometimes," said Grippard, with a modest air. "It is a pretty defect which occasionally serves better than the most virtuous qualities."

"That is true," replied Déroute, philosophically.

"And that is what brought me success."

"Tell me about it."

"Oh! it is very simple. At our first dinner he has shown some of his hatred against Belle-Rose; this has made me reflect. At the second dinner that if my captain was a captain, it was through a thousand villanies."

"The beggar!" exclaimed Déroute, applying a furious blow of the fist to the table.

"At the third dinner," continued Grippard, "a magnificent idea suddenly struck me; I confided to him the fact that I hated Belle-Rose with a deathly hatred. Bouletord came near embracing me. I related to him a terrible history from which my captain came out as black as ink.

'Quartermaster,' I have said to him, 'enroll me in your squad, and we will kill him together.' Bouletord was much moved; he has pressed my hand, swearing upon his soul that I was a gallant man. I have signed an ugly paper which he has drawn from his pocket, and now I am one of the king's archers."

"Eh! that is not so badly done!" exclaimed Déroute.

"One sometimes knows the air without knowing the words," replied Grippard, looking at himself in the smoky mirror which ornamented the cabaret.

"It is a first success," replied Déroute; "you are now master of the enemy's secrets, and if I penetrate into the heart of the place, we are sure of succeeding."

"Then I entreat you to make haste."

"What do you mean?"

"It is known that Belle-Rose has left England; his presence at Paris is suspected. Monsieur de Charny has put the police on the lookout for him, and Bouletord has undertaken to watch the convent."

"Well, return to Bouletord; I shall go and talk this over with my captain and Cornelius."

As he went along Déroute revolved a thousand projects for introducing himself into the convent garden; but it was in vain—he could think of nothing. It was in this frame of mind that he arrived in the Rue du Pot-de-Fer St. Sulpice, at the worthy Monsieur Mériset's.

"Eh, friend! what is the matter now?" exclaimed Cornelius at sight of the sergeant who had the countenance of a philosopher short of philosophy.

"The matter is if we do not carry the place by assault, it will be necessary to raise the siege."

And Déroute imparted to him the revelations of Grippard.

"You have spoken," said Cornelius, "now read."

Déroute took the paper which Cornelius handed to him; it was a letter from Claudine containing these words:

"I have made the gardener talk; he is expecting his nephew, whose name is Ambrose Patu, and whom he has never seen; this nephew is a native of Beaugency. He is to come this evening by the coach and to descend at the hostelry of the Cheval Noir, Rue du Four St. Germain, presenting himself to-morrow morning at the convent. It seems to me that this news presents an excellent opportunity."

On reading this note, Déroute leaped with joy.

"I am in the gardens!" he exclaimed.

"No; it is I who will go there," replied Belle-Rose.

"You?"

"Yes, my friend," interrupted Cornelius, "it is an idea of the captain—he pretends that his place is in the garden."

"Certainly, since Suzanne is there," said Belle-Rose.

"And it is you who wish to don the dress of a youthful gardener?" said Déroute.

"Certainly."

"There is only one little inconvenience—the first look a nun throws at you will tell her that you are a gentleman."

"Eh! my friend, I have handled the pruning-bill."

"But you wear a sword! Stay, captain, let me tell you one thing. I do not know what the future reserves for us, but once in that cage of stone which is named a convent, one is never sure of leaving it. If you are discovered, what will you do?"

"I shall be killed before I am taken."

"This is all very well for you, but when you are dead, what will happen to Madame d'Albergotti?"

Belle-Rose sighed.

"Do you wish me to tell you?" continued Déroute, "she would die. What you intend to do, I will do better than you, having the language and manners of a poor devil, woman or villager. If I perish in the enterprise, it will be time for you to take my place."

Belle-Rose took his comrade's hand and pressed it.

"Do as you wish," he said to him.

Déroute did not wait for him to say it twice and left for the hostelry of the Cheval Noir, after having put on a coat which gave him the appearance of an artisan. In the dusk he saw arrive a strapping young fellow, carrying under his arm a small valise and at the end of a stick a package tied up in a handkerchief with white and blue squares. This young man went along looking at all the signs, his hat thrown back, his mouth open, and dragging his gaiters along the gutter, with an astonished air. The sleeves of his coat only reached to his elbows, and his hair fell like flax over his ears.

"Hey! Ambrose Patu!" cried Déroute, running to meet him.

The young fellow leaped to the other side of the gutter thoroughly frightened. His valise came near rolling in the mud, and he remained planted upon his long legs in the very middle of the street.

"Stay," said he, "you know me?"

"Parbleu! if I did not know you, would I have called you?"

"That is true," replied Ambrose; "but all the same, it is very funny that you should know my name when I do not know yours."

"I will explain this to you. But first, I wish to assure myself that you are indeed the man whom I desire to see."

"If it is Ambrose Patu whom you seek, I am the man."

"Oh! in your country things do not go that way. There are so many people who seek to deceive others."

"I am not one of those people."

"I do not doubt it, and your countenance answers for you; but it is necessary to take precautions. Come! you say, then, that you are Ambrose Patu?"

"Ambrose Patu, from a little neighborhood near Beaugency."

"That is it, and you come to enter, in the capacity of gardener, the convent of Benedictine nuns in the Rue du Cherche-Midi?"

"Quite right. It is my Uncle Jerome Patu who has sent for me."

"Exactly. You are seeking the Cheval Noir, and tomorrow morning, you are to go to the convent with a letter from your honest old mother."

"That is it," said Ambrose, who, thoroughly stupefied, drew the letter from his pocket.

"Very well," said Déroute; "I see that you do not seek to deceive me. Follow me, then, friend Patu; the inn is near here; we have matters to talk about."

Ambrose followed without doubting such a prudent person and entered the Cheval Noir. Astonished at what he had heard, the honest fellow would have doubted the virtue of his patron saint before suspecting the probity of his guide. Déroute asked for a room, had a table set with two covers, ordered the unsealing of a bottle of the best wine, and, when the dinner was served, bolted the door.

"Sit down there," said he to his companion, who had looked at all the preparations without breathing a word; "here is a little Suresne which you will sample for me, and a 'gibelotte' such as one eats only at the table of a king."

Ambrose sat down, stretched out his long legs, and emptied his glass at a draught.

"Ah, comrade," said he, smacking his lips, "you who know me so well, tell me a little about yourself."

"That is just," said Déroute, "I also am a Patu."

"Ah, bah!"

"Oh! my God, yes! but a Patu of a different branch, a Patu from Soissons, cousin of your uncle Jerome Patu."

"You are still of the family, let you be from Beaugency or from Soissons."

"Certainly, the name is everything, the country nothing; I say, then, that I am a Patu—Antoine Patu, called Patu Blondinet."

"That is a funny nickname."

"Yes, very funny. I get it from the color of my hair."

"In that respect I also would be a Blondinet," said Ambrose, laughing.

"That would make two Blondinets in the family," replied Déroute, who kept on filling the glass of Ambrose Patu. "Now, when my Cousin Jerome had learned of your arrival, he said something like this to me: 'Antoine, my friend, go see your nephew, and when you have treated him well, send him back immediately to the country.'"

"What!" exclaimed Ambrose, letting fall his fork.

"Unless it pleases him to become a monk," he has added.

"But he has had me to come for being a gardener, and not for being a monk!" said Ambrose, who picked up again a piece of rabbit with the end of his fork.

"That was because just then Jerome did not know all. The king has issued an edict."

"What have I to do with the edict?"

"Drink this glass of white wine and you will understand better."

Ambrose took the glass and pricked up his ears.

"This is how it is," continued Déroute: "The edict of the king prescribes that all individuals employed in the interior of convents must take the frock; where there are nuns he wishes that there should be monks."

"It is abominable."

"Certainly, but it is the king's will."

"What will Catherine say, who is waiting for me in the country."

"That is just what Jerome said to me this morning; that poor Catherine, what will become of her? After all this can be arranged, you will become a monk, my dear Ambrose, and Catherine will marry somebody else."

"No! no!" exclaimed Ambrose, "I have promised Catherine to marry her, and I will marry her."

"I believe you! a pretty girl!"

"You have seen her?"

"Parbleu!" said Déroute, with a marvelous assurance, "and besides, they even speak of her at Paris."

"What worries me is to lose my place, a good place."

"Pooh! a place between four walls."

"I do not say nay. But one hundred livres of wages with food and lodging. One earns one's dowry in three or four years."

"That is true; but, bah! Uncle Jerome will earn it for you."

"In fact, I am his heir. So my Uncle Jerome, old though he is, is going to become a monk?"

"It is necessary. He takes the frock to-morrow. See if your heart tells you to do likewise."

"My heart has never spoken to me of the convent; it hears only Catherine. What is vexatious is that I have scarcely a crown left; it is little for such a long road."

"Oh! do not disturb yourself, Uncle Jerome has provided for that."

"How is that?"

"If it happens," he has said to me, "that Ambrose does not like the convent——"

Ambrose shook his head.

"——you will hand him," continued Déroute, "these twenty crowns and four louis."

As he said this, Déroute displayed upon a table the white and yellow pieces. The eyes of Ambrose sparkled at this sight.

"All this for me?" said he, with his hand upon the money.

"All this, and moreover, this double louis for Catherine."

Ambrose took the whole, opened his valise, and placed the money at the bottom.

"Friend Blondinet," said he, "I will leave to-morrow by the coach."

"And you will do well; the convent will lose a good gardener by it, but it will be the fault of the king."

"Is it well understood?" continued Déroute, while Ambrose was stuffing his crowns and louis between his shirts and stockings in the valise.

"Certainly!"

"Then give me Madame Patu's letter."

"Mamma's letter?"

"Yes."

"What do you want with the letter?"

"It will serve me as a proof with Jerome; he must know that I have fulfilled my commission."

"That is true," said Ambrose, and he gave Déroute the letter.

The king's edict, Catherine, the gold louis danced all night in Ambrose's dreams. At daybreak Déroute awoke him. They embraced like old friends, and one took his way to the Rue du Cherche-Midi, while the other went in the direction of Beaugency. The attendant of the convent called Father Jerome as soon as Déroute had stated the motive of his visit.

"What do you want with me?" asked the gardener, on entering the parlor.

"My uncle, it is your nephew who comes to be a gardener," replied Déroute, with a simple air.

CHAPTER XL.

A PONIARD THRUST.

Jerome embraced his nephew, in whom he recognized at once a family air. Déroute did not wink, and the gardener forthwith installed him in his lodging. From the first day, Déroute set out to gain the confidence of Castor and Pollux; he succeeded therein by an abundant distribution of dainties, with which he had provided himself. Jerome, who noticed it, was astonished at such a great friendship for animals.

While caressing the dogs, who gamboled around him, Déroute took possession of his new domain; he went over the entire place in order to familiarize himself with its topography. Father Jerome accompanied him in his visit, and mixed dissertations upon the art of gardening with commentaries upon the Patus of Beaugency. Déroute had a reply for everything, and made with an imperturbable tranquillity the biography of thirty persons whom he did not know, aiding himself, without seeming to do so, with the recollections of Jerome. Toward evening Déroute knew the garden of the convent as well as if he had inhabited it all his life. Just as they were about to return, Jerome nudged him with his elbow.

"Hey! my nephew," he said to him, "look at the end of that hedge, and you will see some one who always has something shining to leave between my fingers."

"Stay, I wish to see her closer," replied Déroute, and he walked toward her.

His uncle followed him.

The piercing eye of Déroute had at once recognized Claudine, and he was not vexed to place himself in communication with her.

"My good lady," said Jerome, "this is my nephew, an honest fellow, who has had the desire of being presented to a person so full of virtues. If he can serve you in any way use him freely."

In spite of the peril of the situation, Claudine bit her lip to keep from laughing at the sight of the impassible figure of the sergeant, who was twisting his hat with one hand and scratching his ear with the other.

"I believe that one can count upon you," said she, "and I ask you to take this crown in order to drink to my health."

To take the crown it was necessary to approach Claudine; Déroute did so after Jerome had shoved him forward; but, as he bent over, he said, very low and very quickly:

"Hold yourself ready; it is necessary to make haste."

Claudine thanked him with a look and moved rapidly away. She found Suzanne waiting for her at the bend in a walk.

"I have seen Déroute," Claudine said to her, in a joyous voice.

"And I Monsieur de Charny," replied Suzanne, drawing Claudine under the thick shade of the chestnut trees.

"You have seen Monsieur de Charny?" repeated Claudine, all of whose gayety disappeared.

"If Belle-Rose has not delivered me before three days, I am lost," continued Suzanne. "Monsieur de Louvois is tired of my resistance. I must become a nun or get married in three days."

"No, no," exclaimed Claudine, who wept as she embraced Suzanne.

The convent bell rang the Angelus, and the two friends separated. An hour after this conversation Cornelius, who prowled unceasingly around the convent, ran against a gentleman who was entering the Rue Vangirard by the Rue Cassette. The shock caused the hats of the two young people to fall.

"Eh! morbleu! the man with the cloak!" exclaimed one of the two, "you go very quickly! suffer me to stop you," and he placed his hand upon the guard of his sword.

But the blade, half withdrawn, returned to the scabbard, and the gentleman extended his hand to Cornelius with a burst of laughter.

"Upon my word, I was going to commit a folly. But, monsieur, one should forewarn people when one goes from Dover to Paris."

"My first visit would have been for you if my presence here was not a secret," replied Cornelius, taking the hand of the count.

"Parbleu! I do not know whether I ought to rejoice at this meeting," said Monsieur de Pomereux, "otherwise I should have had the pleasure of a duel with a passer-by, if this passer-by had been some one other than you!"

"Decidedly," replied Cornelius, "inaction is contrary to your disposition; the first time that I saw you, you were about to get killed; the second, you absolutely wish to kill some one. It is a malady."

"You jest, I believe! I should like to see you in my fix. The most abominable adventure has happened to me. I am furious over it. Still, if there was some one on whom to vent my anger——"

"I am truly vexed not to be able to be that some one; but, upon my honor, if you were to kill me, it would singularly disturb my plans."

"Stay," continued the count, without paying any attention to Cornelius' reasoning, "I make you the judge of it; there is a lady of the name of d'Albergotti——"

"You have related me that history," interrupted Cornelius.

"To you? it is, my faith, true! I relate it to everybody, so I no longer know who knows it and who does not. Well, my dear Irishman, would you believe that she still continues to obstinately refuse me."

"In truth?"

"She has a heart of stone! I am in despair, not so much for myself as for her; for, you know, a woman whom one loses is happiness gained."

"So that it is the love of one's neighbor which inspires you to do what you do."

"I believe that the love of one's neighbor cuts some figure in it; but that is a point which I seek to hide from myself. A good gentleman who loves without being loved —it is humiliating."

"Parbleu!"

"However, on leaving the parlor, I did not conceal any of the dangers that she ran. She smiled at me and answered: 'Let the will of God be done!'"

"Ah! yes," said Cornelius, "the famous dangers of which you spoke to us in England—a convent and a vail."

"Stay, it is a narrative which I wish to tell you. Since I cannot kill any one let us go and sup somewhere."

Cornelius readily consented. Monsieur de Pomereux, who was posted about all the cabarets of Paris, gained the corner of the Rue du Dragon, where there was at this epoch a renowned eating-house keeper, knocked at the door, entered and had a table set in a room.

"Monsieur landlord," he said to him, when the cover was laid, "go and get me some of your best wine, and pray God that I find it good, for in my present humor, if it is not passable, I shall set fire to the house and massacre you all."

Having spoken thus, Monsieur de Pomereux drew his sword and placed it on the table. The tavern-keeper decamped in great haste and came back five minutes later, followed by two valets, each of whom carried ten bottles. The proprietor took one of them and offered it to the count, keeping one eye on the bottle and the other upon the sword. Monsieur de Pomereux uncorked it and drank the whole at a draught. There was a moment's silence, during which the proprietor and servants looked stealthily at the door.

"It is almost good, go, I pardon you," said the count.

The servants disappeared, and the two guests sat down facing each other. Cornelius had less appetite than curiosity; nevertheless, as the hour was advanced, the supper good, and as he was besides a very accommodating man in all things, he bravely assisted his companion.

"At what point was I in the story?" said Monsieur de Pomereux, after having torn in pieces a hare and two partridges.

"You were speaking of the perils incurred by your unnatural sweetheart."

"Ah! yes. See how my anger gets the better of me; I will have to kill a servant-boy. I am going to call the landlord to tell him to bring me one. Hello!"

"Stop, you can kill him as you go out."

"Well, you will remind me of it."

"It is agreed."

Monsieur de Pomereux threw an empty bottle through the window, broke the neck of a full bottle, and continued:

"Madame d'Albergotti imagined at first that it was only a question of a nun's vail or that of a bride. I have had to confess the entire truth to her; she is in danger of Fort l'Eveque or Vincennes."

"Diable! but they honor her much! Behold her treated like a criminal of state!"

"It comes from the fact that, thanks to Monsieur de Charny, my gentle cousin, Monsieur de Louvois, has caught wind of the maneuvers of Belle-Rose."

"Indeed!"

"Now the minister is a very prudent minister, who imagines that one is more safe in a prison than a cloister, in a dungeon than in a cell."

"That is also the opinion of jailers."

"Ah! if Madame d'Albergotti consented to pronounce her vows, he would leave her at ease in the pious house of the Benedictine nuns, quite sure that she would no longer leave it. But she is a frail creature who is wonderfully resolute. She would let herself be killed before articulating the sacramental 'yes,'"

"It is obstinacy."

"Yes, but in the language of sentiment it is called constancy. Do you believe that in order to draw her from this gulf, I have proposed to her to marry her and to afterward take her where she prefers to go, to some château of mine, if one is left me, or to one of my estates, promising her on my faith as a gentleman, to never return there without her permission? But no, she would not!"

"She has refused you?"

"Without hesitation. Monsieur de Louvois will laugh at me."

"Faith, my dear count, it is necessary to place this refusal to the account of feminine caprices. A woman accepts and refuses just as it rains and the wind blows—without one's knowing why."

"The most curious fact is that, not being able to be Madame d'Albergotti's husband, I am to become her tyrant."

"You!"

"It is an idea of Monsieur de Louvois. In three days I will place myself at the head of an escort which will take her I know not where, and at which point I am to assume charge of her. My cousin wishes to make of me a species of Bluebeard. 'Monsieur le comte,' he has said to me, 'take care that the lady is not carried away from you after having played with you. Repulsed and deceived—it would be too much for your renown.' This has piqued me, and upon my honor, I am going to become pitiless."

The supper was about over; Monsieur de Pomereux arose, brought his fist heavily down upon the table,

causing the glass and china to rattle in a frightful fashion, after which he descended. When they were in the street, each one went his way, one toward Monsieur de Louvois' hotel, the other toward Monsieur Mériset's inn; but when about to separate, Monsieur de Pomereux, taking from his finger a ring, handed it to Cornelius.

"Take this, my Irish friend," he said to him; "I do not know what enterprise you are pursuing, but, in case of misadventure, strike boldly at the Hôtel de Pomereux, Rue du Roi-de-Sicile; this ring will open all its doors to you, and you will be in safety."

Cornelius slipped the ring in his pocket, and the two guests having pressed each other's hand, separated. The young Irishman found Belle-Rose in conference with Grippard. The honest corporal entertained the idea that the expedition would be perilous. Bouletord was always around the convent with seven or eight rascals armed to the teeth. There was in a stable in the Rue St. Maur half a dozen horses all saddled and bridled in case of alarm, and the watch was kept up day and night.

"If it was only a question of my skin, it would be nothing," said the soldier, by way of peroration, "but I am afraid of the galleys."

"Bah!" said Cornelius, who just then came in, "a brave man is always master of his own life."

This argument appeared final to Grippard, who said nothing more.

"Come," said Belle-Rose, "we will act soon."

"We will act to-morrow," said the Irishman.

And he related what he had learned from Monsieur de Pomereux. Belle-Rose bounded like a lion.

"If I fail," said he, "as true as there is a God I shall go to Monsieur de Louvois and bury this poniard in his heart."

And he turned toward heaven the blade of a poniard which he carried under his coat. It was decided that the abduction should take pace the next evening. Cornelius and Belle-Rose had agreed with Déroute upon a signal which would inform him of the day fixed on for the escape; this signal was to come from the mansard formerly hired by the sergeant, and upon which he was to throw his eyes from time to time. Belle-Rose had provided himself with a rope-ladder. While they were arranging plans, Monsieur Mériset entered the apartment, cap in hand. He was somewhat pale, and he wore an air of mystery.

"Pardon, messieurs, if I disturb you," said he, "but I

would fail in all that which I owe my lodgers if I did not warn them of what is taking place."

"What is taking place, then, my worthy Monsieur Mériset?" said Belle-Rose.

"This is it: Some persons whose appearance I have thought suspicious are prowling around my house. I am certain that they are not watching me; from which I have concluded——"

"That not prowling for you, they are prowling for us," interrupted Cornelius.

Monsieur Mériset bowed in sign of assent.

"It is a logical reasoning," continued Belle-Rose, "and which is not devoid of truth."

"That is why I have mounted to your room," said the proprietor. "It is not very far from the Rue du Pot-de Fer St. Sulpice to the Bastile; therefore be on your guard——"

"We are on our guard, my worthy host, and it is with the intention of avoiding a new disturbance with the men of the king that I ask you to render me a service."

"Speak, monsieur," said Monsieur Mériset, bowing low.

"Have you still that dear nephew who is your heir?" said Belle-Rose.

"I have."

"He is a boy who knows something of horses. I recollect the lively fashion in which he has galloped from Paris to Bethune."

"It does not become me to praise my nephew, but it is certain that no one purchases a horse in the quarter without consulting him."

"Ask him, then, to procure me to-morrow four horses of good blood, having nerve and wind. Grippard here will take them to the place where they will be wanted. As to the price, I shall not stand upon it, and your nephew shall have ten louis for his trouble."

Monsieur Mériset promised and withdrew. Grippard slipped away to rejoin Bouletord; Cornelius and Belle-Rose leaped over the garden walls and gained the lodging vacated by the sergeant. On turning the corner of the Rue du Pot-de-Fer St. Sulpice, they perceived in the corner of a porte cochère two disagreeable looking fellows, who immediately came forth. But at sight of the swords which shone in the moonlight, the rascals made off.

"Monsieur Mériset was not deceived," said Belle-Rose.

Five minutes after three lights forming the points of a brilliant triangle shone at the window of the garret.

Déroute, who was making his round in the convent gardens, stopped short.

"Come! it is for to-morrow," said he, and he went away philosophically to rejoin Jerome Patu.

The next day Cornelius went to the convent; on this day he was followed by a lackey carrying two beautiful silver chandeliers for the altar of St. Claire, for whom Mother Evangélique had a special devotion. The present was welcome, and Cornelius had time to converse with Claudine in the parlor. Claudine, quickly informed as to the new circumstances, charged herself with making them known to Suzanne and promised to follow blindly the instructions of Déroute. She profited by the novelty of the chandeliers to obtain from the superior the permission to traverse the gardens in the moonlight, and so arranged it as to have a long conference with Suzanne. Toward noon Claudine met Déroute, who was walking along with a pruning-bill in his hand, mutilating the apricot trees. No one was anywhere near them.

"Be behind the willows at dusk, at the place where the wall makes a turn."

"We will be there," said Claudine.

At nightfall Claudine and Suzanne threw themselves upon their knees by an instinctive movement and raised their hands to God. It was the decisive hour, and they held themselves in readiness. The chapel bell rang, the steps of the nuns going to the evening devotions were heard, and soon the songs resounded. Great white clouds were extended like a scarf of gauze over the horizon, where floated the vailed moon. The windows of the chapel sparkled in the night, Suzanne feigned a headache to keep from going to the chapel, Claudine having recommended her to wait for her in her cell. Suzanne half opened her door and counted the minutes. At seven o'clock Claudine came out; the prayers filled with their pious murmurs the long corridors of the convent; the attendant, who knew the order of the superior, let the young boarder pass, but Claudine had not made three steps when she returned.

"I have forgotten my cloak and am going to look for it; will you, my sister, leave the door open?" said she.

And like a bird she rushed down the somber hall.

Her feet did not touch the floor, and nevertheless Suzanne heard her and leaned her head out of her cell.

"Come!" said Claudine, and both descended the stairway.

In passing before the narrow room where the attendant

was, Claudine leaned toward her, in that way masking the door.

"Thanks, my good sister," said she.

Suzanne slipped out, and Claudine followed her. They plunged into the silent depths of the park, and embraced as soon as they were sheltered by the trees.

"Some minutes more, and we are free," said Claudine.

They ran to the angle of the wall and found Déroute waiting very impatiently.

"I have given the signal twice, and no one has answered me," said he. "Wait for me here."

Suzanne shivered and felt Claudine's hand tremble in hers. Déroute walked along the walls, and assisting himself by some branches, climbed like a cat to the top. The night was black, great clouds having suddenly vailed the moon. He listened, and it seemed to him that whispering was going on some few steps from him. Déroute got astride of the wall and descended by planting the blade of his knife between the stones. When he had reached the ground, he went straight in the direction from which the whispering had come, but all at once two men pounced upon him.

"Go to the devil!" cried one of them, who was Grippard, while Bouletord struck him with a poniard.

The voice saved Déroute; he received the blow in his clothing as he leaped to one side like a squirrel. Bouletord threw himself upon him, but the sergeant gained the wall and disappeared in the shadows. At the end of a hundred steps he climbed a tree and jumped from it into the convent garden.

"That is a blow, Monsieur Bouletord," said he, as he rose, "which I shall endeavor to pay you back."

CHAPTER XLI.

BY THE AID OF FIRE.

Suzanne and Claudine had heard Grippard's cry; this cry carried away all their hope as a gust of wind carries away a spark; they pressed each other close, trembling for Jacques and Cornelius. Just then they heard Déroute as he fell upon the turf. In two bounds he was before them.

"It is a spoiled affair," he said to them; "return quickly."

"Jacques? Cornelius?" said at the same time Suzanne and Claudine.

"They are saved, think of yourselves."

Déroute pulled forward the two women; the silence was profound, but the dogs growled and rattled their chains. On quitting the two women Déroute ran to the dogs. Claudine knocked at the door, the attendant opened, and the same ruse which had protected Suzanne in going out protected her return. A quarter of an hour had sufficed to ruin their hopes; when Suzanne and Claudine knelt down before the image of Christ, the sonorous barking of Castor and Pollux resounded in the park. While Déroute hastened to make disappear every trace of escape and to awaken Father Jerome to efface all suspicion of complicity in case of accident, Bouletord and Grippard were searching along the wall, the one swearing, the other reasoning.

"Sangdieu! he must be a sorcerer!" exclaimed Bouletord, and he went along the wall, looking everywhere. At the end of fifty steps, his foot struck a dead body.

"Here he is!" exclaimed the quartermaster, and he leaned over.

Grippard shivered, but Bouletord rose like a tiger.

"Mordieu! it is one of my own men whom they have killed," said he; "he has been struck in the breast."

Bouletord took a whistle and blew it. At this signal, several archers posted here and there ran up. Around the dead body the soil was pressed by numerous steps, but the murderers had left no other trace of their passage. One of the archers declared, however, that two men enveloped in cloaks had approached the wall a quarter of an hour before Grippard's cry; he had asked them for the word of order; the two men had given it to him, and he had let them pass, taking them for agents of Bouletord.

"The word of order? they have given it to you?" exclaimed Bouletord.

"Parbleu! they must have stolen it," replied Grippard.

The silence around them was profound; it was necessary to renounce any enterprise for the night. Bouletord distributed his men around the convent, and stretched himself out under a tree with Grippard, his confidant.

This is what had taken place: The same morning of the day fixed for the escape, Bouletord, walking in the direction of the Rue Vangira d, had met Monsieur Mériset's nephew leading four horses by their bridles. This nephew

was a jovial lad who frequented cabarets and gaming-houses, where he had formed all sorts of bad acquaintances, among which was that of Bouletord. It was a side of his life which he did not reveal to his uncle, who regarded him as a little saint.

"Hey! Christopher!" said Bouletord, "those are fine animals you have there; they ought to bring you in two hundred pistoles."

"That would be a bad bargain. They cost me four thousand livres!" replied the nephew, coming to a halt.

"Your dear uncle, then, has a desire to stock his stables!" said the quartermaster, caressing the neck of one of the horses.

"Him! he loves his louis too well to risk a single one of them."

"It is, then, for you!"

"Nothing in the hands, nothing in the pockets," said Christopher, striking his gusset. "Ah! yes! there will be this evening ten or twenty pistoles which the gentleman will give me for my trouble."

"What gentleman?"

"The gentleman at Papa Mériset's, a proud soldier who talks like a duke and pays like a king."

Bouletord pricked up his ears.

"Ah! ah!" said he, "and he has need of four horses, your gentleman?"

"I have an idea that they will see some country before to-morrow's sun. I have been recommended to choose the most active and vigorous beasts."

Bouletord had not forgotten that Belle-Rose had been arrested at Monsieur Mériset's.

"It is clear," he thought; "his temerity is cunning; who the devil would have thought the swallow would have returned to the nest?"

Bouletord, wishing to clear up his first suspicions, proposed to Christopher to drink a bottle or two at the cabaret on the corner. They drank, and Bouletord questioned Christopher. In the midst of his thoughtlessness, Christopher was an honest and worthy fellow. Seeing himself questioned, he understood at once that he had already said too much; he was silent, emptied his glass, remounted his horse and rode away. But Bouletord divined the unknown from the known. If horses were purchased, it was for flying, and if they wished to fly, it was because they cherished the hope of carrying off the captive. Boule-

tord rubbed his hands and went to relate everything to Grippard.

"I have them," said he, in conclusion.

That was also Grippard's opinion, and he affected a great joy.

"Good!" said he to Bouletord, "I am not pleased with my pistols, and as I intend not to miss the stroke this evening, I shall run to the company's locksmith."

But instead of running to the locksmith, he took his way to the Rue du Pot-de-Fer St. Sulpice; Cornelius and Belle-Rose were not there; Grippard ran to Déroute's observatory; the two friends had left it in the morning. Grippard snatched out a handful of hair; but this pantomime not aiding him to discover either the captain or the Irishman, he ran like a stag and took the road to the hostelry of the Roi David. He pushed open the door and found Cornelius.

"At last!" said Grippard.

"Be silent," replied Cornelius; "I am expecting Christopher and his horses."

"That is what I wish to talk to you about."

Grippard drew Cornelius into one corner and related to him all that he knew of Bouletord's plans.

"There will be a dozen armed men around the gardens," said he; "at the least alarm, they have orders to fire."

"Well," said Belle-Rose, who had just come up, "I am going to recruit five or six determined rascals, and it will be a battle."

"Bless me!" replied Grippard, "dresses are not cuirasses; if the women receive the balls, that will be your affair."

Belle-Rose hit his fists.

"Come," said he, "we shall act according to circumstances. It is too late to warn Déroute."

Night came, oats were placed under the noses of the horses, and they quitted the hostelry of the Roi David. As Grippard had told them, there were archers all around the convent. Belle-Rose quivered with impatience.

"At least," said he, "let us warn Déroute."

They advanced and gave the word, they were permitted to pass and gained the wall. At the end of thirty steps, believing themselves alone, they stopped; Belle-Rose drew a silk ladder from his pocket; but, just as he was about to throw it over the wall, a man concealed in a recess of the wall, threw himself upon him. Belle-Rose seized his arm with one hand, and with the other planted his poniard in the man's breast. The man fell without uttering a

single cry. The entire blade had disappeared in the wound. At the same moment they heard Grippard's imprecation, and Déroute's rush to the wall. Belle-Rose and Cornelius threw themselves into the somber corner from which the man had launched himself and waited, pistols in hand. Déroute mounted a tree ten steps away from them and crossed the wall at a bound. Belle-Rose climbed like the sergeant and was followed by Cornelius. At the end of a moment Bouletord and Grippard came up. From the midst of the branches where they were concealed they heard Bouletord's exclamation on seeing the dead body. Tranquil as Déroute, they kept quiet; toward midnight the rain began to fall; the night was black, the nearest sentinel was promenading twenty steps away. Belle-Rose and Cornelius descended from the tree and walked softly over the rain-soaked ground.

"Who goes there?" some one cried, ten steps away from them.

This time Belle-Rose and Cornelius fled without replying.

"*Qui vive!*" repeated the voice, and at the same moment a shot was fired.

Belle-Rose and Cornelius kept running.

"Brother, are you hit?" said Cornelius.

"I have the ball in my cloak," replied Belle-Rose.

Bouletord's troop was behind them; but the shadows were so thick that they soon reached the Rue de Sèvres without being disturbed.

"Where are you taking me?" Belle-Rose asked Cornelius.

"Come on," said the Irishman, who had his idea.

At the end of a quarter of an hour they arrived at the Rue du Roi-de-Sicile. Cornelius struck at the hotel of the Comte de Pomereux. The intendant was called, and at sight of his master's ring, he introduced the two strangers into a comfortable apartment, where, by his order, a supper was served.

"Where the devil are we?" said Belle-Rose.

"At the home of our enemy, Monsieur de Pomereux, and we are better off here than at our friend Monsieur Mériset's," replied the Irishman.

This night the house in the Rue du Pot-de-Fer St. Sulpice was visited from top to bottom by Monsieur Charny.

"The birds have come," said he to Bouletord, "but they have flown."

The next day Déroute might have been seen prowling around the orchard of the convent, pruning-bill in hand;

his eyes turned incessantly toward the door through which Claudine was accustomed to descend to the garden. Déroute was cutting the branches around him.

"Eh! my nephew, what are you doing there?" exclamed the old Jerome; "you are massacring that tree."

"I am killing it," coldly replied the nephew; "this tree absorbed the nourishment of its neighbors. Do you not see that if these apricot trees have no fruit, it is the fault of this plum tree?"

The assurance of Déroute stupefied Jerome, who bowed before the science of his nephew. Toward noon Claudine appeared Déroute's arm was tired of cutting, Claudine was very pale. She threw her eyes around her. Jerome was gardening in one corner; she approached Déroute.

"Extend your apron as if for cherries, and we will talk," he said to her.

"Did you hear that shot?" said Claudine.

"It gave me a chill, mam'zelle."

"Do you think that one of them has been wounded?"

"No; I was prowling under the wall. Bouletord has sworn fearfully, and that has made me understand that he has failed to hit anything."

"What a terrible night, my God! But, alas! everything is not finished."

"What is the matter now?"

"Suzanne is to be taken to-night I know not where; to the Bastile, perhaps."

"To-night?"

"Mother Evangélique told her so just now. Monsieur de Louvois has been informed of the adventures of this night, and though they have failed, he does not wish them to be renewed. It is impossible to now warn Cornelius or Belle-Rose. What must we do, my God?"

"I will warn them myself," said Déroute, whose excellent physiognomy took on a ferocious expression. "Go now, mam'zelle, and in case of alarm, hold yourself ready."

Claudine left with a lighter heart. Déroute came down from the tree, ran to the lodge, and returned with a large, red handkerchief, which he attached to the highest branch of the cherry tree.

"What are you doing there?" sked Father Jerome.

"Faith," said he, "the cat-birds have eaten half the cherries; it is for saving the rest."

"Hold! your idea is good, my nephew."

"Yes, I sometimes have that kind."

Belle-Rose and Cornelius had quitted at an early hour the Hotel de Pomereux and had disguised themselves in such a manner that Bouletord himself would not have recognized them. Belle-Rose mounted to the garret, after having observed the surroundings of the place. Cornelius had gone to the Roi David to wait for Grippard. As soon as Belle-Rose had seen the red handkerchief floating from the top of the cherry tree, he trembled and descended the stair-way four steps at a time. In three bounds he reached the Rue des Franco-Bourgeois-St. Michel.

"Déroute is at work," said he to Cornelius and Grippard; "I have seen the signal."

"The red handkerchief?" exclaimed Cornelius, quickly.

"Yes."

"Déroute is a firm and prudent fellow; the peril must be imminent."

"He will find us ready."

"You have heard, Grippard, it is for this evening," said Cornelius.

Christopher, whom the alarm of the preceding night had rendered more circumspect by teaching him the danger of unbosoming himself to the police, promised to have the horses saddled and bridled at dusk and at a place which they designated near the convent. Meanwhile Déroute slipped in his pockets two pistols, of which he was as sure as of himself, and concealed under his coat a poniard, which he had more than once had occasion to handle.

"The affair must come to a finish," he said to himself "the veritable Ambrose Patu may return at any time."

The evening came. Déroute left his lodge and traversed the garden. He had remarked, on the day of his entrance at the convent, a collection of sheds in which were heaped; all sorts of old furniture along with straw and hay for feeding three or four cows which the nuns kept. These sheds were fifty feet away from the main building. Déroute went straight to them, and crouched down in a corner. He drew from his pocket a tinder-box, lit a piece of touch-wood, slipped it under a pile of shavings and began to blow it with all his lungs; two minutes after a bright flame shot up. Déroute overturned two or three heaps of straw and went out drawing the door after him. He was not at the end of the avenue when the smoke came out through all the cracks. When he turned around, he saw the flames devouring the roof. Déroute began to run as fast as he could toward the convent, crying:

"Fire! fire!"

Jerome, who was the first to hear him, lost his head and cried still louder without moving an inch. Mother Scholastique looked out at the window and exclaimed:

"Great God! the convent is burning."

The nuns, who were going to vespers, heard the exclamation of Mother Scholastique and were seized with a frightful panic. Claudine, whose mind was occupied with Déroute's words, at once divined his intention on seeing him run over the terrace with a frightened air. She rushed to Suzanne's cell, took her by the hand, and together they descended the stair-way. Mother Scholastique ran to the convent bell and rang it. The men of the quarter, who had already seen the flames above the walls, ran up at the sound of the tocsin. The doors of the convent were broken open, and the crowd rushed into the court. This was what Déroute wished. As soon as he saw the people enter the gardens of the convent, he ran to where he had perceived Suzanne and Claudine.

"Follow me!" he said to them.

There were so many nuns among the crowd that no one thought to look at them; they made thirty steps in the direction of the door; Belle-Rose and Cornelius had entered with the crowd; they recognized Claudine and Suzanne and joined them. Bouletord was there; a movement of the crowd caused the false gardener's hat to fall.

"Déroute!" cried Bouletord, who understood everything.

He wished to rush forward, but a living rampart was interposed between them. Bouletord foamed with fury. Belle-Rose and Cornelius, throwing away their cloaks, raised the one Suzanne, the other Claudine, in their arms; the crowd, believing that it was a question of wounded nuns who were being transported far from the fire, gave way before them.

Monsieur de Charny had entered with the rest; it was the hour when he was accustomed to make his daily round. At Bouletord's cry he armed himself with a poniard and finding an egress through the crowd, threw himself upon Déroute, who preceded Belle-Rose. But the sergeant saw everything without having the air of paying attention to anything; just as Monsieur de Charny raised his hand he seized him by the throat and parried the blow with his other arm, with which he twisted the gentleman's wrist. The pain caused Monsieur de Charny to let go of his poniard; the sergeant's fingers were pressed tightly around his throat; his face became purple, his knees gave way, and he fell heavily.

"Make room for the poor sisters," repeated, tranquilly, Déroute, leaping over Monsieur de Charny's body.

They reached the door and crossed it; Grippard slipped away a moment.

"Go!" said he, "I will not be long."

And he took his way toward the Rue St. Maur. The little troop gained the place where Christopher was guarding the horses. They mounted and rode away at a gallop. Grippard arrived all out of breath a moment after, and, plying the spur, he quickly rejoined the fugitives. The four horses champed their bits and made a thousand sparks burst under their feet. A great noise was suddenly heard behind them; they turned their heads and saw an immense whirlwind of flame mount toward the sky, then fall.

"The sheds have fallen in," said Déroute; "I knew that the fire would make a bigger scare than it would do harm."

"I owe you everything!" Belle-Rose said to him, looking at Suzanne, whose arms were wrapped around his neck.

"It is well! it is well! Keep on galloping," replied Déroute. "Hey! Grippard, let us stay behind. I imagine that we are not through with Bouletord."

CHAPTER XLII.

THE BEGGAR.

Bouletord, left to his unaided efforts and hemmed in by the multitude, took more than a quarter of an hour to disengage himself. His men went and came without understanding anything of what was taking place; they had seen so many persons leave that they no longer paid any attention to anything and waited for orders to act. Just as he had seen Monsieur de Charny disappear and Déroute leave, Bouletord had uttered a cry of rage and rushed toward the door of the convent; a movement of the crowd had pushed him in the direction of Monsieur de Charny. Bouletord saw the favorite of the minister stretched out senseless and raised him; Monsieur de Charny opened his eyes, looked around him, understood everything that had taken place, and bounded to his feet.

"Where are they?" asked Monsieur de Charny.

Bouletord pointed to the door with a despairing gesture.

"To the horses!" cried the gentleman.

When they succeeded in leaving the court Monsieur de Charny was white and Bouletord purple with fury. The one was mute and threatening; the other hurled forth a thousand imprecations.

"To horse!" howled Bouletord to the first archers whom he met.

All ran toward the Rue St. Maur, where the stable was. As they rushed forward, Bouletord at their head, Monsieur de Charny perceived Monsieur de Pomereux, who came galloping up to the scene of the fire.

"What the devil is taking place here," the gentleman asked the favorite.

"Nothing much; your *fiancee* is being carried off."

"Madame d'Albergotti?"

"Faith, yes. She is riding behind Belle-Rose. You have been tricked, Monsieur le Comte."

Monsieur de Pomereux had, as the reader has seen, a good share of vanity; the thought that he had been placed in a ridiculous position caused him to blush.

"Ah! they have gone!" said he.

"The poor widow has set fire to the convent to light up her second wedding," said Monsieur de Charny, laughing.

Monsieur de Pomereux thought of the courtiers who were going to laugh at his adventure, and, if he was not a man to fear a cannon-ball, he was horribly afraid of ridicule.

"What road have they taken, do you know?" he said cutting his horse's flanks with his whip.

"That will be easy to find out," replied Monsieur de Charny, delighted to see Monsieur de Pomereux wrought up to the point to which he wished to bring him.

Some of the crowd being questioned, answered that they had seen a troop of four cavaliers galloping in the direction of the quays. Upon a sign from Monsieur de Pomereux, one of the lackeys offered his horse to Monsieur de Charny, and they set out in pursuit of the fugitives. But it was necessary to stop at every street corner to question the passers, and this took up a considerable time. Meanwhile Bouletord and his comrades, having reached the stable in the Rue St. Maur, prepared to mount their horses; but as they set feet in the stirrups, all fell upon the straw, drawing the saddles with them. The girths were cut. Bouletord swore like a pagan. Before other girths were found and adjusted, ten minutes had been consumed. Finally they started, but at the first effort the bridles broke near the curbs, and there was another halt.

The bridles had been tampered with the same as the girths. These two accidents, succeeding each other so closely, awoke Bouletord's suspicions; while one of his men was entering the shop of a harness maker he looked around him.

"Where is Grippard?" he exclaimed.

"He is not with us," answered one of the archers.

"Has any one seen him?"

"I have!" said another archer; "I was on guard at the stable when he entered it almost an hour ago."

"Double traitor!" howled Bouletord; "if I do not cut his heart out of him, may I be damned."

The bridles fixed the troop moved off. Belle-Rose and Cornelius had taken their course through the Rue du Four; at the carrefour of Buci, they found a soldier of the watch who wished to oppose their passage. Belle-Rose's horse struck him in the breast, and the soldier rolled over on the ground. They threw themselves into the Rue Dauphine, which was crossed in an instant. At the entrance of the Pont Neuf they saw a squad of police. Déroute perceived them first. He set spurs to his horse and threw himself in front, followed by Grippard.

"Run to them," said Déroute, "and cry with all your might, 'Service of the king!'"

"Why?" said Grippard.

"Go and cry first, mordieu!"

Grippard ran to the troop and cried, in his loudest voice: "Service of the king!"

The troop opened, and the fugitives passed like a thunderbolt.

After the Pont Neuf they took the quays and gained the Hotel de Ville. The little troop took the St. Denis road. The plan of the fugitives was very simple; they counted, at the end of a dozen leagues, to gain a farm in the country, to pass the night there, and to return the next day to Paris, where no one would think to look for them; then, at the first good opportunity, they would join Monsieur de Luxembourg and place themselves under his immediate protection. The road which they followed led to Pontoise. The horses were vigorous, the night limpid, the sky luminous. They pushed on as far as Franconville.

At Franconville, Déroute knocked at the door of an inn and asked for a sack of oats, which he paid for without haggling. They made a halt under the trees, at thirty steps from the road, and the provender was placed under the noses of the horses, who immediately went to eating

it. While Belle-Rose and Cornelius were flying, Bouletord was in hot pursuit of them; Monsieur de Pomereux and Monsieur de Charny had preceded him, accompanied by four or five of the count's servants. At Franconville Monsieur de Pomereux and his lackeys, better mounted than Bouletord, left the police behind. The young count and his followers had horses of English stock accustomed to hunts. Monsieur de Pomereux and Monsieur de Charny rode in front, the lackeys followed at twenty steps, then came the archers. At the end of half an hour the distance which separated them had increased, and the two troops lost sight of each other. Bouletord's spurs were red with blood. Meanwhile Belle-Rose and Cornelius kept their steeds at a rapid pace without being pressed.

"We must spare them," said Déroute; "when we have passed the Pontoise, we will take across the country and tranquilly retrace our steps in order to throw the police off the scent."

As their little troop reached Pierrelaye, Grippard and Déroute heard a neigh some distance behind them. The mare which Belle-Rose was riding answered it by another neigh. Déroute jumped in his saddle.

"We are being followed!" said he, quite low.

"I believe it," replied Grippard.

Déroute reached Belle-Rose in two bounds. But before he had opened his mouth, he understood by the increased speed of the cavalcade that the horses had felt the spur. On hearing his horse neigh, Monsieur de Pomereux pricked up his ears.

"There are cavaliers before us," said he, and leaning over his stallion's mane, he hastened rapidly on.

Belle-Rose and Cornelius exchanged a look, and each of them surrounded his companion with a firmer arm. Their horses had already crossed eight leagues at a gallop; they did very well even as far as St. Ouen-l'Aumone, but in traversing the village, Belle-Rose felt his mare totter under him; at the same moment Cornelius' horse stumbled and sank upon its knees; two digs of the spur made them rise again, and the animals bounded, neighing with pain. Another neigh resounded upon the route, more sonorous and still nearer. Déroute loaded his pistols.

"In ten minutes they have gained half a league," said he; "in half an hour, if they keep on in this fashion, they will be upon us."

Belle-Rose's and Cornelius' horses, sustained by the bridle and the spur, fled along the route, but their flanks

were white with foam, and they were giving way under their double burden. Suzanne and Claudine dared not speak, but at times they threw, above the shoulders of the cavaliers, a long glance over the white road which was lost in the transparent night. Déroute and the faithful Grippard galloped side by side, mute and resolute. The little troop turned around Pontoise; the foam of the panting horses was becoming red about the nostrils. When they were near d'Ennery, Déroute heard pass with the breeze a neigh so vigorous that he turned his head. A black speck was visible upon the road, growing larger and larger.

CHAPTER XLIII.

THE ABBESS OF THE CONVENT OF ST. CLAIRE.

This black speck was Monsieur de Pomereux riding at full speed. Scarcely had he heard the neigh of the mare ridden by Belle-Rose, when he dug both spurs into his horse; the stallion, excited by the emanations which were exhaled from the humid flanks of the mare, left like an arrow. In three minutes the count had passed Monsieur de Charny. Nothing was heard of Bouletord and his men. At some hundred steps from d'Ennery, Déroute, measuring with his eye the distance which still separated Belle-Rose from Monsieur de Pomereux, whom he had recognized, understood that it was time to take the decisive part. He rushed toward the captain, and pointed out to him with his finger the cavalier who was approaching with the rapidity of a thunderbolt.

"There are four men behind him," said he.

Belle-Rose leaned toward Cornelius.

"I confide Suzanne to you," he murmured to him.

"I was going to confide Claudine to you," replied the Irishman.

"Grab your pistols!" exclaimed Déroute, "here they are!"

The sergeant fired at once, but the shot, not aimed well, only plowed its way through the count's hat. The count passed before him like a bullet and fell upon Belle-Rose. But scarcely had the two blades crossed, when Monsieur de Pomereux recognized the stranger who had come to his aid at Dover.

"Morbleu!" he exclaimed, "I owe you my life!" and he lowered the point of his sword.

Belle-Rose pushed straight up to him.

"Forget it and let us finish!" he exclaimed.

Monsieur de Pomereux let his sword remain lowered and saluted him with the hand.

"In my place, monsieur, you would do nothing of the kind," he said; "permit me, then, to imitate you in something. I have besides my revenge to take, and I wish it in its entirety."

The count spoke with a dignity which struck Belle-Rose; in his turn the captain turned the point of his sword toward the ground.

"Here are the lackeys!" exclaimed Déroute.

"The lackeys belong to the master, and the master is conquered," replied the count.

As he said this, he took his sword in both hands, and breaking the blade, he threw away the pieces.

"What are you doing?" exclaimed Belle-Rose.

"You have conquered and disarmed me, that is all," replied the count.

Suzanne gave him her hand; Monsieur de Pomereux kissed it with as much grace as if he had been at a ball, and threw himself before his lackeys.

"Down with the muskets!" he exclaimed.

The stupefied lackeys obeyed. Monsieur de Pomereux made some steps in the direction of Belle-Rose and Cornelius.

"Go," he said to them; "over there, to your left, in the direction of Livilliers; there is an abbey where you will undoubtedly be received. But above all, do not delay a minute. Listen!"

All listened intently. The gallop of a troop of cavaliers resounded a quarter of a league away.

"Monsieur de Charny is not far off, and Bouletord follows him with seven or eight archers," continued Monsieur de Pomereux.

"You are a noble young man!" exclaimed Cornelius, shaking him cordially by the hand.

"What would you, one must pay one's debts," Monsieur de Pomereux gayly answered him.

The fugitives entered a path which led through the fields. They had not made five hundred steps when Bouletord and Monsieur de Charny came up with Monsieur de Pomereux. The police rode fresh horses, which they had found at an inn upon the road, a little before St. Ouen-

l'Aumone. These horses belonged to a band of jockeys who were taking them to Paris; Bouletord having heard them neigh and prance in the stable, had stopped and demanded them in the name of the king. The jockeys had resisted at first, but at sight of the uniform and muskets they had submitted; the horses which Bouletord and his men had been riding were left in the stable, and they rode away on the others, quickly coming up with Monsieur de Charny.

"Are they taken?" asked Monsieur de Charny, a moment immovable in the middle of the road.

"Who?"

"Eh! parbleu! Belle-Rose and his gang?"

"My faith, they are still flying."

"They are flying, and you do not pursue them?"

"I have my account, my dear Monsieur de Charny," replied Monsieur de Pomereux. "My sword is in pieces, my hat is ruined, and in looking more closely, I believe I have two inches of steel in my coat."

"Sangdieu! forward!" howled Bouletord, who had stopped three minutes to hear this conversation.

"Forward! you fellows!" cried Monsieur de Charny, addressing himself to the lackeys.

Monsieur de Pomereux threw himself in front of them.

"Every one of you stay where you are!" he exclaimed. And turning to Monsieur de Charny, he added: "My rival has my word; go, we will be your witnesses."

Monsieur de Charny threw upon the count a disdainful look and rode away.

Monsieur de Pomereux followed with the lackeys. Between Bouletord and Belle-Rose there was almost a quarter of a league; both troops moved forward rapidly. On rounding a small hill, Déroute got down off his horse.

"Take my horse," said he to Belle-Rose; "he is in better trim than yours, having carried only me."

Grippard imitated Déroute in favor of Cornelius. The exchange was made in two seconds, and the young people set spurs to their horses, who plunged forward with a desperate energy. It was a last effort, the impulse lasted five minutes; at the end of this time the horses began to lose ground. Bouletord gained steadily upon them. Between Bouletord and his archers there was a hundred steps distance. Déroute and Grippard, who were riding together, formed a sort of rear-guard for the fugitives. As they emerged from a little wood, Déroute saw in the plain the white walls of an abbey whose steeple was outlined

upon the pale sky. At this sight Bouletord, who divined the intention of the fugitives, uttered a cry of rage and pricked his horse with the point of his sword. His archers imitated him; they seemed to devour the ground. Déroute measured with his glance the distance which lay between Belle-Rose and the abbey; it was sufficient to make it probable that Bouletord would reach the captain before he had crossed it.

"Now is the time," said the sergeant.

He stopped his horse, took the musket hung to the saddle-horn, and loaded it. When Déroute turned toward Bouletord, a terrible expression was depicted upon his face. He lowered his musket and held his enemy under his aim for the space of ten seconds; his arm seemed of iron like the barrel, so immovable was it. When Bouletord was not more than about thirty steps away, he fired. Bouletord let go the reins and fell upon the horse's neck. His hand seized the mane and held to it; the frightened horse flew like an arrow and passed before Déroute, carrying away its rider, whose livid head beat its flanks. The ball had struck the quartermaster in the forehead. At the end of a hundred steps Bouletord slipped from the horse and fell at the feet of Belle-Rose, who seized the horse by the bridle and stopped it. Monsieur de Charny was following Bouletord at the head of the archers. Grippard, as the reader knows, imagined that in everything it was best to imitate Déroute. Just as Déroute took his musket, Grippard took his, when Déroute took aim at Bouletord, Grippard sought something to place at the end of his barrel. Monsieur de Charny came in very nicely. After the sergeant's shot, Grippard, like a conscientious man, pressed the trigger with his finger. But Monsieur de Charny's horse having reared at the first explosion, Grippard's ball, which should have struck Monsieur de Charny, struck the beast instead. The horse fell upon its hocks, rose, and fell again, drawing Monsieur de Charny down with it in its fall. The police, seeing their two chiefs stretched out on the ground, came to a sudden stop; two or three archers dismounted in order to assist Monsieur de Charny, the others discharged their muskets at Déroute and Grippard; but Grippard and Déroute were already flying in the direction of the abbey; the balls whistled in their ears, and that was all. Monsieur de Pomereux, at the head of his lackeys, galloped behind the archers and appeared to take a keen interest in the incidents of this skirmish. As soon as he was near Monsieur de Charny he

dismounted and went to inform himself as to the state of his health.

"When you fell, monsieur, I was much afraid," said he; "but, so far as I can see, you are not wounded."

"Not at all," replied Monsieur de Charny, in a surly tone.

"It is a stroke of luck, monsieur; for, in truth, we must render justice to these fellows' talents. As a result of it, I lose a horse worth a thousand crowns."

"Eh! monsieur, instead of discoursing, it seems to me that you would do better to gallop!" exclaimed Monsieur de Charny.

"That is a point upon which I regret not to be in accord with your lordship. Certainly I am not altogether dead like that poor devil Bouletord, but I am not much better off."

Monsieur de Charny shrugged his shoulders.

"What would you?" continued Monsieur de Pomereux, "these people have not my life, but they have my word."

Monsieur de Charny bit his lips till the blood came.

"Your horse," said he, addressing an archer.

The archer dismounted, and Monsieur de Charny leaped into the saddle.

"Forward! you men!" he exclaimed.

All the troop followed him.

Monsieur de Pomereux threw his eyes in the direction of the abbey. The fugitives had profited by the disorder occasioned by the death of Bouletord and the fall of Monsieur de Charny. They were now within a hundred steps of the abbey. The two women had been placed upon Bouletord's horse; they were the first to reach the abbey.

"Madame," they said to the nun who received them, "there are two gentlemen here who claim your protection —if you do not come to their aid, they are lost."

"Let them enter if they are innocent, let them also enter if they are guilty," said the nun, "the house of God is an exile open to all the unfortunate."

Belle-Rose's horse fell at the door of the abbey; that of Cornelius had fallen at fifty steps from it; the blood came from its nostrils; it pawed the earth with its feet and died. Déroute and Grippard had abandoned theirs upon the road and were running as fast as their legs could carry them. All entered through the half-open door; just as the nun pushed it shut, Monsieur de Charny was seen passing like a flash between the trees of the avenue. Suzanne fell on her knees and thanked God.

"In faith!" said Monsieur de Pomereux, when he was at the foot of the walls, "I believe that our birds have found another nest. It is my opinion that it would be well for us now to seek another inn."

But Monsieur de Charny passed straight before him and struck at the door of the abbey with the handle of his sword. Monsieur de Pomereux stopped his horse and began to caress it with his hand.

"Vulcan will be foundered," said he; "it is a thousand crowns that I will make Monsieur de Louvois pay me."

Monsieur de Charny kept on striking.

"Monsieur," continued the count, "if you knock so hard, you will have to answer to the Bishop of Paris, who is very jealous of the rights of the church."

All this tumult at an advanced hour of the night had drawn the abbey from its repose.

"Open in the name of the king!" cried Monsieur de Charny.

Meanwhile the abbess made her appearance. The fugitives had been introduced into a kind of parlor, where they were waiting, pursued by the threatening voice of Monsieur de Charny. When the door of the parlor opened, the abbess trembled and drew her vail around her face.

"Welcome, my sisters; and you, gentlemen, hope," said she.

Her grave and sweet voice calmed their anguish; it appeared to Claudine that they no longer had anything to fear; she bowed over the abbess' hand and kissed it. Belle-Rose felt his heart beat without being able to understand why.

"Say to that man who strikes at our door," said the abbess, addressing herself to a sister, "that the superior of the Abbey of St. Claire d' Ennery will presently answer him herself."

The abbess withdrew, and the sister went out to execute her order. At the sister's words, Monsieur de Charny threw a look of triumph at Monsieur de Pomereux and sheathed his sword.

Monsieur de Pomereux looked at Monsieur de Charny, smiled and did not reply.

"Come," thought the count, "if he is silent, it is that he believes me lost."

A quarter of an hour passed in a profoud silence. Monsieur de Charny went and came, somber and threatening, before the great door of the abbey. Monsieur de Pomereux stealthily examined the priming of his pistol.

"After all this Monsieur de Charny is a bandit," he said to himself, "and I shall get out of it with a foreign trip."

Just then the great door of the abbey opened, and a marvelous spectacle was presented to the eyes of the cavaliers. The sanctuary of the abbey was lit up; banners floated around the altar, and incense smoked in the cassolettes; the kneeling sisters were singing sacred hymns, and at the feet of the protecting cross were to be seen the kneeling fugitives. The Christ seemed to cover them with its mutilated arms, and the marble angels raised to heaven their hands joined in the attitude of prayer. At the moment when the door revolved upon its hinges the abbess, preceded by the cross and banner, and followed by nuns in long files, turned toward the porch. The holy procession advanced slowly and stopped beside the great columns; the abbess crossed the threshold; the silver cross shone between her hands, and the banner of the order floated above her forehead. When she had set foot outside the abbey, the songs died away. The archers had at first taken off their hats, but at sight of the cross, they hesitated; one of them dismounted, and throwing down his musket, knelt down upon the grass, another imitated him, then a third, then all, conquered by this costume of religion. Monsieur de Pomereux was the first to uncover his forehead and leap from the saddle. Monsieur de Charny alone remained in the saddle, his head uncovered and his hand upon the guard of his sword. Between the abbess and he there were scarcely ten steps; beyond the sisters, in the light of the choir, he saw Belle-Rose and Suzanne; near them, Cornelius and Claudine; behind them, Déroute and Grippard. Monsieur de Charny urged forward his horse. The horse made three steps and stopped. The brilliant light of the chapel frightened it. The abbess extended the cross toward Monsieur de Charny, and with the other hand she pointed out the fugitives.

"This is the house of God," said she, "and God protects those whom you seek. Enter now if you dare."

Monsieur de Charny recoiled slowly like a conquered tiger. When he was twenty step away, the abbess returned to the chapel, and the door closed with a sonorous noise. Then, pushing aside her vail, she showed to the fugitives the face of Genevieve de La Noue, Duchèss de Châteaufort.

CHAPTER XLIV.

A NEST IN A CONVENT.

After the door of the Abbey of St. Claire d'Ennery had closed upon the fugitives, Monsieur de Pomereux turned to Monsieur de Charny.

"Well, monsieur?" said the count.

"I return to Paris," replied Monsieur de Charny.

"To see my glorious cousin, no doubt."

"To see Monsieur de Louvois, to whom I will make known the aid which you have lent me in all this affair; I have no doubt but what he will demonstrate to you his keen satisfaction in the matter."

"Parbleu! my dear Monsieur de Charny, I count on your friendship to be assured that you will be the first to bring me news of it."

The body of Bouletord was picked up from the road, and the little troop gained Pontoise, where Monsieur de Charny and Monsieur de Pomereux separated. The former took post horses and returned to Paris; the other looked around the streets until he had found a cabaret, and gayly installed himself therein. Monsieur de Pomereux conducted himself in a manner to prove to the most incredulous that bad fortune had not deprived him of his appetite. At daybreak the count buckled on his belt and paid his reckoning.

"Monsieur de Charny must, by this time," he said to himself, "have rendered an account to my illustrious cousin of the result of our pursuit. It is a narrative which will have shown me under such an heroic point of view, that I will hardly know how to escape the gratitude of monseigneur le ministre. I have indeed a small pretext to allege in my justification, but with a minister of that character, it is necessary to be fourteen times right not to be in the wrong; my pretext is insufficient. I have still the resource of going to fight the Turks, but, in the meantime, the shortest way is to go to Chantilly. When I shall be in the house of the Prince de Condé, the minister will respect me beyond all question. My pretext will at once take the stature of a truth."

Monsieur de Pomereux mounted his horse, took an unused road and went straight to the royal residence of the Prince de Condé. The Prince de Condé, the same who was one day to be called the great Condé, had seen the father

and eldest brother of the Comte de Pomereux upon the battle-field of Rocroi; the brother had been killed in Flanders, fighting under him. He gave a cordial welcome to him who came to sit down in the shadow of his name. Monsieur de Pomereux could at once regard himself as an officer of his household. When Monsieur de Charny had informed Monsieur de Louvois of the events of the night, the minister leaped in his chair. He had him repeat the details of this flight, and Monsieur de Charny omitted no circumstance of it. Monsieur de Louvois had sat down again and was listening to him with keen attention. This apparent calm in such a violent nature, announced a deep resentment. After he had finished, Monsieur de Louvois arose.

"You know," said he, "His Majesty's disposition. The king does not trifle in matters of religion. All that which concerns the things of the church is sacred to him. If you had penetrated the sanctuary of the abbey, I would have been constrained to disown you, and perhaps he would never have pardoned me this violence. We must wait."

Monsieur de Charny fixed his piercing look upon the minister.

"To wait is not to forget," continued Monsieur de Louvois. "Let it be in a month or a year, sooner or later, Belle-Rose and Madame d'Albergotti will leave the Abbey of St. Claire d'Ennery; fortune has aided them too often not to betray them some day. That day will be ours."

"We will wait," said Monsieur de Charny, with a sinister smile.

"Find out what they are doing and what they wish to do. If either or both of them try to quit the abbey, place no obstacle in their way, but watch for their departure. Too much precaution would frighten them and give to Madame de Châteaufort and Monsieur de Luxembourg the time to act for them. They must be imprudent. You understand me?"

"Perfectly."

"We have been tricked twice; it is twice too many times; Belle-Rose has escaped from the Bastile, Madame d'Albergotti has fled from the convent, they are now united——"

"One victory will avenge two defeats."

"As to Monsieur de Pomereux, I will show him that chivalry is out of date."

"I believe that he was wounded, monseigneur," said Monsieur de Charny, with an air of commiseration."

"Why did he not continue? He would have had less trouble to get himself killed."

"But he had pledged his word."

"And his word pledges his head, monsieur."

While Monsieur de Pomereux was at Chantilly with the Prince de Condé, and Monsieur de Charny with Monsieur de Louvois at Paris, the fugitives were blessing God who had protected them in their enterprise. No expression could paint the surprise of Belle-Rose and Suzanne when they saw the face of Madame de Châteaufort. Both looked at her in a frightened manner, while she advanced toward them, calm and smiling. It was no longer the same woman; grief had passed over that beautiful forehead, and it had left behind an unalterable sadness, spread like a vail over her features.

"Be without distrust," she said to them; "this house is yours, and the hand of God is between you and those who hate you."

Genevieve embraced Suzanne and Claudine and saluted Belle-Rose with a pale and sweet smile. Belle-Rose found nothing to say in reply.

In the heart of Suzanne there was no longer room for hatred. If jealousy awoke for a moment at sight of Genevieve, she quickly dismissed this sentiment, unworthy of both, and returned the abbess' sisterly kiss. The nuns retired to their cells, and Genevieve herself showed the guests to the apartments destined for them. Belle-Rose, Cornelius, Déroute, and Grippard were established in a detached building in the gardens of the abbey; Suzanne and Claudine remained with the abbess.

The next day at noon Madame de Châteaufort sent for Belle-Rose. She received him in an oratory whose only window opened upon a landscape such as Paul Poter loved. In the distance, a river—the Oise—bathed with its sluggish waters great plains adorned with poplars; on the misty horizon were the steeples of Anvers and Heronville, some cottages scattered here and there behind clumps of trees, weeping-willows along the streams, and in the grass a herd of cows and oxen. The sun tinted these two landscapes with a golden light which seemed sifted by the fog. The merles whistled among the hedges, and the rattling of the cow-bells was heard in the meadows. A sort of monastic luxury shone in the oratory; the abbess had not been able to prevent herself remaining a great lady. The ivory Christ was the most beautiful model of Jean Goujon; the pictures attached to the oak panels

belonged to the best Italian painters, among them being a Nativity, by Corregio, a St. Claire, of Andre del Sarto, a Virgin with the Child, of Guido; the holy-water basin and the angel were the work of Germain Pilou. In this oratory, religion made itself sweet and attractive. Genevieve could not avoid a keen emotion on seeing Belle-Rose. A tear hovered between her eyelashes.

"I thought myself strong," she said to him, "and see how your presence stirs my heart. It is a proof no doubt that God has wished to try me; he has aided me, he will aid me."

Belle-Rose's heart gave a bound; he turned aside his eyes and looked through the window at the fields and the horizon to keep Genevieve from seeing his emotion.

"And besides, Jacques, why should I not weep before you?" she continued; "there are hours when tears are agreeable to God; it seems to me that suffering is more fruitful than prayer, and I have suffered so much that I begin to believe that I am pardoned."

Conquered by these words, Belle-Bose took Genevieve's hand and carried it to his heart; his eyes were filled with tears, and he no longer concealed them.

"You, too!" said she; "then I am still dear to you. Stay, Jacques! I have consecrated all my life and all my soul to God, and yet not a day passes that I do not pray to Him for you."

"You are my sister, Genevieve, and another life which you do not share would be little to me," Belle-Rose said to her.

Genevieve softly pressed his hand.

"Your words are sweet to me," said she, "but permit me to forget myself in order to speak of you."

"Speak, Genevieve."

"I have talked all night with Suzanne; she has unbosomed herself to me as to a sister, and I know what griefs have agitated you both since that evening at Villejuif. It is the hand of God which has led you here. You have entered here wandering and proscribed, you will leave it free and married."

Belle-Rose trembled at these words.

"If misfortune visits you, at least you will be two to support it; if happiness smiles on you at last, it will appear more sweet to you being together," added Madame de Châteaufort. "You must not quit this exile before a priest has blessed your love. Two spouses can live in the shade of this abbey; can two lovers do so?"

"I will do as Suzanne wishes," said Belle-Rose.

"Suzanne is ready," replied Genevieve; "in three days you will be married."

Belle-Rose then withdrew. Left alone, Madame de Châteaufort knelt down before her prie-Dieu.

"My God!" said she, in a voice broken by sobs, "bless them and may they be happy."

She remained a long time immovable; when she arose, her face was like that of a martyr, suffering and resigned. The Abbess of St. Claire d'Ennery sent for the Bishop of Mantes, who promised to give to the young couple the nuptial benediction, and it was decided that Claudine and Cornelius should get married on the same day.

The evening before the day fixed for the ceremony, Monsieur de Pomereux presented himself at the abbey. No sooner than he had been announced Belle-Rose and Cornelius ran to meet him. The three young people embraced.

"Morbleu!" exclaimed the count, "it seems that I am always destined to act contrary to good sense; I ought to hate you with all my soul, and I feel that I love you with all my heart."

"You have made the history of my sentiments," replied Belle-Rose.

"Now that I have paid upon the Pontoise road the bill of exchange which you drew upon me in a street in Dover, speak to me of your affairs."

Cornelius related to Monsieur de Pomereux what had been resolved upon.

"We are to get married in the abbey chapel," he added; "but, considering the situation of things around the monastery, we could just as easily get married in great pomp in the parochial church of Pontoise."

"What! not an archer in the neighborhood?" said the count.

"Not one; besides, you ought to have been able to convince yourself of it while coming here. Have you met a single member of the police?"

"Not a single one, and that is what worries me."

"Would you have preferred to see fifty of them?"

"Perhaps, yes."

"This is pleasant."

"Eh! pardieu! when Monsieur de Charny acts, one at least knows what he is doing; but when he keeps still, Lucifer himself cannot divine what he meditates. If there are no alguazils around the abbey, it means that there is a crowd of spies a quarter of a league away."

The justness of this observation struck Cornelius and Belle-Rose.

"Hold," added Monsieur de Pomereux, "happiness lulls you. You know Monsieur de Charny, and you have seen him at work. Form your conclusions."

"Thanks," said Belle-Rose, pressing the count's hand; "therefore you advise us to be on our guard."

"More than ever; I do not know where the peril lies, but it is somewhere. When Monsieur de Charny does not bark, 'tis because he is making ready to bite."

Déroute was warned.

"Good!" said he, "I still have some powder and lead."

Thereupon he began to load his muskets and pistols.

The Bishop of Mantes arrived the next day. The altar was decorated with flowers. Claudine, red as a strawberry, knelt down near Cornelius, not far from Belle-Rose and Suzanne. Genevieve was seated in the choir with the other witnesses, who were Monsieur de Pomereux, Déroute, and Grippard. The abbess had assumed the insignia of her religious rank and taken off her vail. When the ceremony was over the abbess signed first upon the parish register. Suzanne threw herself into her arms.

"I owe my happiness to you," she said to her, "how shall I ever repay you?"

"Love me," replied Genevieve, "and we shall be quits."

A lodging had been prepared for the two couples in a building belonging to the abbey, but separated from the main building by vast gardens. The sisters never passed a certain limit which the superior alone had the right to cross. The newly married couples went to this house, where they were at the same time free and in safety.

"You are at home here, and you will stay here so long as it pleases you," Genevieve said to them. "Be happy. I withdraw."

"Will you not sometimes come to visit us in this retreat which we owe to you?" Suzanne pleaded.

"Yes," replied Madame de Châteaufort, kissing her on the forehead, "I will return at times to breathe in the shade of your happiness."

Monsieur de Pomereux was walking the room; all at once his eyes fell upon a box placed on a piece of furniture. He picked it up, and seeing the name upon the superscription, he uttered a slight cry. Suzanne turned around, and seeing him quite pale, ran to him.

"What is the matter with you?" said she.

"Who has given you this box?" he replied.

"Gabrielle de Mesle, a poor girl who died in the convent."

"Gabrielle is dead?" exclaimed Monsieur de Pomereux, trembling.

"Yes," replied Suzanne, "her last sigh has been the name written upon that box."

"The Chevalier d'Arraines! she still loved him, then!"

"Do you know him?" exclaimed Suzanne.

"I am he, my God!"

As he said this, the count fell upon a chair and concealed his face between his hands.

CHAPTER XLV.

THE CHEVALIER D'ARRAINES.

Grief in a man so frivolous in appearance as Monsieur de Pomereux had something strange and sincere about it which profoundly touched the spectators. All were silent. Suzanne opened the little box and drew from it the letter and tress of hair which she handed to the count.

"This," said she, "is all that is left of Gabrielle."

Monsieur de Pomereux took the letter and pressed it to his lips at the place where was to be seen the handwriting of the dead girl. As to reading what she had written, he could not, so dimmed were his eyes by tears. Presently he arose, and taking one of Suzanne's hands and extending the other to Belle-Rose, he said to them:

"I am accustomed to jest and I weep like a child; but before you it seems to me that I can do so."

"These tears make us esteem you more," Suzanne said to him. "Kind hearts are the only ones that suffer."

Monsieur de Pomereux had Suzanne relate the details which she had received from the mouth of Gabrielle. The death of this poor girl agitated him profoundly.

"She was so young and so good! What was I doing, great God! while she was dying?" said he.

And he again burst into sobs.

"Wretch that I am! How comes it that I have not divined her presence at the convent? I would have snatched her from it."

"She would not have permitted it," said Suzanne.

"It is a terrible story! Was I worthy of that pure heart? I have lived in a strange fashion, and nevertheless I have

always loved her. I have followed many miry paths, carried far from her by I know not what indomitable passion, what insatiable desires; but in this existence, she is the only thing which I have surrounded with love and respect. She was the drop of dew upon the arid rock, the perfumed flower among the thorns. Poor Gabrielle! When I met her, I was a younger son, having for sole fortune only the cloak and the sword. The Chevalier d'Arraines was not a suitable match for the daughter of the Marquis de Mesle; I loved her, and I told her so without knowing why. Later my brother died; heir to the title and the name, I could almost aspire to her hand; but I was without news of her, and it was then that my father sent me to Malzonvilliers. Since that visit, my days have flowed away like water; nothing is left to me except a little foam on the surface. Poor Gabrielle!"

Having said this, he walked a few steps and then returned to Suzanne.

"You have assisted at her agony and consoled her suffering," he said to her. "In joy and in misfortune, come what may, by the sacred name of Gabrielle, I am your friend."

This scene in which Monsieur de Pomereux had shown himself in an entirely new light, made a profound impression upon the young people; they separated from the count with deeply touched hearts.

"It is a happy day," said Suzanne; "we have found again one friend and gained another."

At some hundred steps from the abbey Monsieur de Pomereux encountered a man who was walking along the road. The fellow examined him very attentively as he passed by. The count, who did not love curious people, started toward him; but the rascal threw himself into a thicket, where he was soon sheltered from all pursuit."

"This proves to me that I was not deceived," Monsieur de Pomereux said to himself. "I should be much surprised if this man was not in the service of Monsieur de Charny."

At Ecouen, Monsieur de Pomereux remounted the carriage which had brought him from Chantilly, and took the road to Paris, giving orders to the postilion to go to Monsieur de Louvois'. He had an idea of the welcome which awaited him at the minister's; but the young count was one of those adventurous minds who take pleasure in violent situations and find a great charm in struggles where life is imperiled. As soon as he had learned of the arrival

of Monsieur de Pomereux, Monsieur de Louvois hastened to have him shown up. The count did not at first see the face of the minister, who was just then drinking from a large jugful of water.

"Diable!" he murmured, "he must be very angry to be so exceedingly thirsty."

"Ah! ah! my handsome cousin, so you have returned, have you?" said the minister, throwing, when he had finished drinking, a keen and swift glance at the Comte de Pomereux.

"Come! I was not deceived," thought the count, who sustained unflinchingly the threatening glance of the minister. Aloud he said:

"In faith, yes, monseigneur; I experienced such a violent annoyance over not having seen you recently, that my first visit at Paris has been to see you."

"It is an instance of great zeal for which I thank you, my dear count."

"Not at all! no one has a whole family of cousins like yourself, and when perchance one possesses one, one owes everything to him."

"I have always counted upon your devotion; it appears even that this devotion has passed beyond my expectation."

"You flatter me."

"Not in the least; I am informed that in the neighborhood of d'Ennery, you comported yourself like a chevalier of the age of chivalry. You have eclipsed the glory of Amidas, and the illustrious Galaor himself is only a coward beside you."

"Ah! monseigneur! you put too much faith in the narrative of Monsieur de Charny."

"It is true; it is from him I have learned of your exploits."

"Monsieur de Charny is an excellent friend! I was quite sure that he would act as he has done."

"Oh! he has concealed nothing from me. Why was I not there to applaud your prowess?"

"Your approbation had been my sweetest reward, monseigneur."

The game pleased Monsieur de Louvois, who amused himself with Monsieur de Pomereux as a cat does with a mouse; only the mouse had a self-possession which astonished him a little.

"My admiration has begun," continued the minister, "at the furious combat which you sustained against

Belle-Rose and the terrible Irishman. I have deplored the fatality which has caused your sword to be broken at the moment when victory was going to declare itself for you."

"War has its ups and downs!" murmured Monsieur de Pomereux, with a gesture full of philosophy.

"Three seconds after, I have been touched even to tears at the narrative told me——"

"Still Monsieur de Charny "

"Quite right—at the narrative told me, I say, of your constancy in keeping your sworn word. It is beautiful, it is grand, it is antique! Regulus would not have conducted himself better, and I imagine that the shade of Aristides ought to be jealous of you. It is a sublime trait, my cousin."

"You overwhelm me, monseigneur," replied the count, with a modest air.

"No, I do you justice."

"My God! monseigneur, I have recollected our relationship."

"That is what I have thought. For example, I have blessed Providence who took care that your sword did not break this time."

"The reason was that fortune owed me a revenge."

"Well, would you believe, my charming cousin, that this heroic conduct has not produced upon others the effect which it has produced on me."

"In truth?"

"There are ill-formed minds which have wished to see in these marvelous adventures a determined effort to cross the authority of the king."

"You don't say so!"

"And they have even gone so far as to assert that you were no longer worthy of His Majesty's favor, and that I ought to withdraw my protection from you."

"As to that I am tranquil."

"How well you know me!" exclaimed Monsieur de Louvois, bathing his lips in the jug of water; "I have repulsed these persons in a furious manner; but one of them, who is a friend of Monsieur Colbert, has observed to me that it was not under such circumstances a suitable thing to charge you with a very delicate mission which I had reserved for you."

"And through respect for circumstances, you have confided the mission to another."

"Should I have allowed myself to be accused of an odious partiality?"

"No."

"Another person has remarked that the king would not be charmed to see at the head of his regiment an officer whose co-operation had compromised the success of an enterprise in which it was important to succeed. The king is somewhat like Monsieur Mazarin; he likes lucky people."

"So I have lost the regiment after having lost the mission."

"Alas! yes; I was much afflicted at the turn which the conversation took when a last blow came to crush me."

"Ah! there is a last blow?"

"A horrible blow! After having despoiled you, these people have affirmed that it was necessary to arrest you. There are fastidious persons who do not believe in broken swords and in engagements of honor."

"Incredulity is a Parisian vice, monseigneur."

"You understand that I have made answer to all these people; unhappily they have returned to the charge, and to prevent their imagining that my relationship rendered me unjust——"

"You have given way?"

"Quite right, my cousin."

"And so I am going to be arrested!"

"It is to the Bastile that you will be sent, and I will then give you sufficient leisure to prepare your defense for confounding the caluminators."

"It is a project which amuses me; the only thing that vexes me is that I cannot execute it," replied Monsieur de Pomereux, with a thoroughly afflicted air.

"And why, then, if you please?"

"Because I shall not go to the Bastile."

"You will not go to the Bastile!" exclaimed the minister, rising.

"My God, no!"

"This is pleasant!"

"No, it is quite serious."

"And if I order you to do so?"

"Then I am sure that the Prince de Condé will forbid me doing so."

"The Prince de Condé!" repeated Monsieur de Louvois, thoroughly astounded.

"Himself!"

"And what has he to do with this affair?"

"Parbleu! am I not an officer of his household?"

"You!"

"Certainly. But, in fact, you do not know the half of what has taken place. Monsieur de Charny's narrative lacks a dénouement. It is quite a story, monseigneur!"

The coolness of Monsieur de Pomereux stupefied Monsieur de Louvois; he swallowed a glass of water and came near breaking the goblet as he set it back on the table.

"Do you wish me to relate it to you?" continued the young gentleman.

"Relate, but make haste," replied Monsieur de Louvois, striking the floor with his shoe-heel.

"Oh! it will not take long! Figure to yourself, then, that after having quitted Monsieur de Charny at Pontoise, I have gone to the Prince de Condé's at Chantilly. The prince has always been kind to my family; we have a thousand proofs of it which I could cite."

"Pass over them."

"So be it; this narrative would wound my modesty. I had expressed to him my desire to enter his household; it so happened that a post of captain of the hunts was vacant; he has offered it to me, I have accepted it, and yesterday morning I entered on my functions."

Monsieur de Louvois was walking the room, his eyes aflame and his brows contracted.

"This morning," Monsieur de Pomereux tranquilly continued, "the Prince de Condé has sent me to Paris to terminate certain affairs which particularly concern him. You understand that if I accept your offer of going to the Bastile, with the object of justifying myself, the affairs of the prince will suffer from it. Now, my interests ought to be secondary, I believe, to his. The Prince de Condé is a prince of the blood, monseigneur."

Monsieur de Louvois walked the room like a wild beast; anger swelled his bosom. All at once, the idea struck him that Monsieur de Pomereux, whose audacity he knew, sought to deceive him in order to gain time.

"Your history is a tale, my honest cousin!" he exclaimed, covering him with his sparkling glance.

"Ah! you think so," said Monsieur de Pomereux, "well, look!"

Monsieur de Pomereux nonchalantly took Monsieur de Louvois by the arm, and leading him to one of the windows of the apartment which gave upon the court of the hotel, he pointed out to him with the finger a carriage which was waiting. The livery was the color of that of the prince, and upon the panels of the carriage was to be

seen the azure escutcheon with the three golden fleurs de lis, with the bar of the house of Condé."

"If any doubt is left you, I can dissipate it," added the count, with the same tranquillity.

And opening the window, he called, in a loud voice:

"Hey! l'Epine!"

A lackey with the livery of the prince ran under the window, hat in hand.

"Lower quickly the carriage footstool, and tell Bourgnignon to tighten the reins; we are going to leave."

The lackey saluted and advanced toward the coachman, who immediately picked up the reins. Monsieur de Pomereux shut the window and turned to the minister.

"You have seen, monseigneur," said he, smiling.

Monsieur de Louvois was pale with anger; great though his power was, he could not yet afford to attack a prince of the blood. The arrest of an officer of the Prince de Condé's household was one of those things whose consequences might be incalculable. The princes of the house of Condé were extremely jealous of their privileges, and they were capable of taking the affair to the king. Simple gentleman, Monsieur de Pomereux was open to any attack; captain of the hunts, Monsieur de Pomereux was protected by the shield with the three golden fleurs de lis.

Fury did not so blind Monsieur de Louvois as to keep him from seeing clear their respective positions. He understood that he was conquered and resigned himself. Monsieur de Pomereux waited with crossed arms.

"Go," the minister said to him.

Just as the count was retiring, Monsieur de Louvois detained him by the arm.

"You are with Monsieur de Condé," he said to him, "stay with him, my honest cousin. It is a piece of advice which I give you."

"It comes from you, and I will take care not to forget it."

Monsieur de Pomereux bowed low and went out.

Since the marriage of Belle-Rose and Suzanne the soft shades of the Abbey of St. Claire d'Ennery had seen the most beautiful days which the two lovers had yet lived. There was a constant succession of long walks in the woods, silent reveries on the banks of the murmuring streams, charming conversations at evening in the meadows.

A time came, however, when Belle-Rose recollected that he had a duty to fulfill. This duty he resolved to perform

without further delay. He went immediately to seek out Déroute, who was amusing himself by making citadels of turf with his friend Grippard and to afterward take them according to all the rules of military strategy. He found him in a corner of the convent, where he had just opened the trench before a bastion.

"Hey! Déroute! the Bishop of Mantes arrives to-morrow evening; we will make arrangements to leave to-morrow evening," he said to him.

Déroute overthrew the bastion with a kick of his foot and threw his hat in the air, crying:

"*Vive le roi!*"

CHAPTER XLVI.

OVER HILLS AND ACROSS VALLEYS.

Since he had attached himself to the fortunes of Belle-Rose, Déroute had contracted a taste for adventures. The reader need not be astonished then if the captain's proposition delighted him.

"You know, Déroute, that to-morrow is the day on which the Bishop of Mantes is accustomed to come each week to the abbey?" said Belle-Rose.

"Yes, captain."

"Monseigneur is ordinarily accompanied by a numerous following."

"There are secretaries in surplices and grooms in high boots, vicars in cassocks, and lackeys in livery, the former in carriages and the latter behind."

"So that when all this crowd goes away, no one thinks of examining people closely."

"It would be a difficult task."

"Well, then, I must be one of those who leave the abbey to-morrow evening with monseigneur."

"And with the livery upon the back, so that the dress shall assist the monk to pass."

"Yes."

"That can be arranged."

"Then you charge yourself with it?"

"Very willingly. There is in the suite a certain coachman who likes to talk war and battles with me. I will relate to him ten sieges and twenty assaults; at the fourth skirmish he will be drunk; when the time comes to blow up the mine he will roll under the table, and I will undress him at the article of capitulation."

"You speak of it as if it was already done."

"Eh! diable, this man has two vices, and I know them. He is mine!"

"Do you know, Déroute, that if you had not been sergeant of cannoneers, you would perhaps have been one of the wise men of Greece?"

"It had been so much the worse for wisdom; mine sometimes borders close on folly."

"Let it be what it will, provided that to-morrow I am a coachman."

"And me something like a lackey or a footman."

"You? no, you stay."

"Ah, bah!"

"Must Suzanne not have a friend upon whom she can count?"

"There is the Irishman."

"Cornelius is married."

"Precisely; he understands household affairs, while I have never been able to speak except of cannons and horses."

"All the same one alone might succeed where two would fail; you shall stay."

"You are an egotist who keeps all perils for yourself."

The next day the Bishop of Mantes reached the walls of the abbey; the days of pastoral visits were holidays for the whole community; the poor of the neighboring villages congregated at an early hour around the doors, where alms were distributed; the sick had themselves transported along the route followed by the holy man who blessed them; he baptized the little children, confessed the nuns, and all the notables of the country came to present him their compliments, begging him to appeal for the benedictions of heaven upon the harvests or the sowing, according to the time. The multitude which incumbered the chapel of the abbey and all the environs rendered surveillance difficult. For whomsoever had wished to quit the convent, alone and mix in with the crowd, there was little risk to run; mixed with the bishop's followers, there was still less. Déroute did not fail to attract to the refugees' lodging the coachman who had such a great weakness for military histories.

"There is inside," he said to him, "a great venison pasty and some Orleans wine which await you; if appetite has come to you in the open air, we shall breakfast together, and, while demolishing the pasty, I will relate to you the siege of Arras, by Monsieur Turenne."

The coachman confided his horses to the first valet he met, and hastened to shut himself up with Déroute. The pasty was uncovered, the bottles uncorked, and the narrative began. While Déroute was treating the coachman, Grippard, who had his instructions, was treating a groom. As to Belle-Rose, he was writing a letter to Suzanne. Toward evening the bishop's conveyances were prepared for departure; the ecclesiastics mounted within, and the lackeys held themselves ready. At this moment Déroute ran to seek Belle-Rose.

"Hey! captain," he said to him, "the trick is played; make haste."

Belle-Rose entered the sergeant's room. The coachman, all undressed, was sleeping like a log upon Déroute's bed, who was laughing with all his heart. The clothes were spread out upon a chair.

"He is drunk as a Swiss," said the sergeant, "and in order that the fantasy to wake should not take him, I have mixed an effusion of poppy in my Orleans wine."

Belle-Rose dressed himself quickly; the coachman was almost of his size and blonde like him; he pulled the hat down over his eyes and descended the stair-way. He was being called when he appeared in the court; he took his way toward the bishop's carriage and climbed upon the seat as if he had done nothing else than this all his life. As Belle-Rose left, Grippard entered Déroute's apartment.

"It is finished," he said to him.

Déroute thanked him and disappeared. The bishop had mounted within his carriage, Belle-Rose touched the horses with the whip, and the team started. At a quarter of a league from the abbey Belle-Rose remarked upon the side of the road some ill-looking persons who looked curiously at the procession. He recalled the warnings of Monsieur de Pomereux, applied a cut of the whip to his horses, and passed without being disturbed; the bishop's livery protected him. They relayed at Meulan, and toward midnight they reached Mantes. The first person whom Belle-Rose perceived in the court of the episcopal palace was Déroute descending from a horse in the costume of a groom.

"It is still you!" he exclaimed, not knowing if he ought to laugh or scold.

"Still me. When I saw you leave, my legs refused to stay there; they have entered all alone into great boots which were close by; my arms, on their part, have stuffed themselves into the stable-coat of a groom who was sleeping in the fashion of the coachman whom you know; I

have found his hat upon my head without knowing how it came there, and while I was reflecting on this metamorphosis, my feet have taken the direction of the stable where the honest fellow's horse was quartered. I have let them alone, so that in a moment I saw myself in the saddle; the horse has left all alone; I have thought that it was Providence which wished it thus, and this is how I have galloped to Mantes."

In proportion as Déroute's narrative advanced, Belle-Rose's anger, which, to tell the truth, was not very great, disappeared.

"And the groom?" he asked.

"Oh! he sleeps beside the coachman."

Suzanne had found Belle-Rose's letter. It contained only a few words. Belle-Rose informed her that a duty, whose accomplishment could not be any longer delayed, called him some ten or twelve leagues from the abbey.

"Fear nothing," he said to her, in conclusion, "I run no danger; our love protects me, and you will see me back in three or four days."

Suzanne communicated this letter to Cornelius, who could not give her any kind of explanation as to the motive for this absence. Cornelius only regretted that he had not been warned.

"At least," said he, "I should have gone with him."

An hour after, they perceived Déroute's absence.

Suzanne thanked the sergeant in the depth of her heart and waited patiently. Belle-Rose and Déroute abandoned the episcopal palace during the night, changed clothing, procured horses, and left Mantes at daybreak.

"Now that I am of the expedition," said Déroute, "you will at least tell me where we are going?"

"We are going to a neighborhood which is three or four leagues from Rambouillet."

"How do you name this neighborhood?"

"Rochefort."

"A pretty nook of ground surrounded by woods and meadows; where there are no trees there is grass; the chickens there are excellent, the girls not ferocious, and the wine not too bad."

"You know Rochefort?"

"I have gone there on a recruiting expedition, some five or six years ago."

"So that you have preserved at the same time the memory of the heart and of the stomach."

"What recollections shall I carry away this time?"

"For this time, my poor fellow, you will scarcely have the leisure to continue your studies upon the character of the Rochefort girls; you will eat two or three pullets if you wish, but you will only drink enough wine to keep you in good health."

"Eh! eh! this has to me the air of an expedition."

"It is in act something approaching it; we have left two, there will be three of us when we return."

"Ah! diable!" said Déroute, fixing upon Belle-Rose a curious glance.

"This third person is not, just now, much higher than your boot.'

"A child."

"Quite right."

Déroute had a question at the end of his lips, but he dared not ask it; Belle-Rose guessed it from the air of his face and smiled. This smile gave courage to Déroute, who was observing him from the corner of his eye; he opened his mouth.

"Say, then, my captain, this little fellow has to me the appearance of being a little cannoneer."

"This little fellow is a light-horseman."

For once Déroute was nonplused; he scratched his forehead and sought in his mind what connection there could be between his master and the little cavalier. He would have sought a long time without finding anything, if Belle-Rose had not drawn him from his embarrassment.

"My comrade," said he, "this light-horseman is a nephew of Monsieur de Naucrais."

"A nephew of the colonel!" exclaimed Déroute, leaping with joy in his saddle.

"Exactly."

"Well, captain, we will make of him a marshal of France."

"Certainly; and to begin with, you will teach him how to handle arms."

The two travelers took the road by Septeuil and Montfort-l'Amaury; it was at the same time the shortest and the surest way. The road was little traveled, and it was not probable that Monsieur de Charny's agents had spread in that direction. They slept at Rambouillet, and at sunrise the following morning they went to Rochefort. At the moment of starting Déroute absented himself some minutes; when he returned to the hostelry Belle-Rose asked him the cause of his absence.

"This is it," replied the sergeant; "it has seemed to me

that for people who go on an expedition we are not very well armed, you with a switch and myself with a hazel branch. I have concluded a little affair just now."

"What affair?"

"A younger son who is going, I know not where, has lost this very night all his ready money at lansquenet; I have offered him twenty pistoles for his outfit, which he has turned over to me at once, and here it is; it contains a sword and pistols; as to myself, I have taken the valet's old clothes."

Belle-Rose slipped the sword in his belt, placed the pistols in the holsters, and they entered the forest of Ivelines. In an hour they had traversed the wood of la Selle, which borders on the wood of Rochefort. It was almost ten o'clock when they saw the first houses of the burg scattered in the fields. A little boy was loitering along a hedge, gathering wild mulberries.

"Hey! my friend!" Belle-Rose cried to him, "indicate to me, if you please, the dwelling of old Simon, the guard; you shall have a pistole for your trouble."

"Follow me and keep your pistole," replied the child, turning in the direction of Belle-Rose.

It was a beautiful child, proud and smiling; his eyes large and soft, his cheeks fresh and embrowned by the sun, his mouth red like a cherry. He shook his head with its silken curls, and took a path through the meadows. From time to time the little fellow turned back to see if the two strangers were following him, and his pearly teeth were seen to shine in a smile. After a quarter of an hour's walk through the fields, they reached a cottage whose front was ornamented with honeysuckle, which formed for it a gay and green cuirass; the swallows had their nests in the window corners, and the gilliflowers, mixed with bindweed and wall-wort, flourished on the edge of the thatch roof. There were some willows behind the cottage, a little meadow in front of which two or three cows were feeding, and at one side a garden filled with fruit trees. When they reached the door they saw the old guard standing in it.

"Here, father," said the child, "are two strangers who desire to speak to you."

The guard approached and saluted Belle-Rose.

"What can I do for you, my gentleman?" said he.

Belle-Rose threw his horse's bridle to Déroute, and asked Simon to follow him within the cottage.

"The affair which brings me," he replied, "has some

importance; it is a question of a child the care of which has been confided to me."

Simon grew pale at these words and looked fixedly at Belle-Rose.

"Who sends you?" he asked.

"A person who has sole authority over this child, the only one who can effectively protect him," and drawing from his pocket a paper, Belle-Rose handed it to the guard.

Simon took the letter and tremblingly opened it. It was from Madame de Châteaufort and prayed the old guard to obey Belle-Rose in everything to whom she transmitted all her rights over the child.

"Order, monsieur," said the guard, who found it difficult to speak.

"Is he here?" asked Belle-Rose.

"He is here."

"Then I can take him away to-day?'

"You can."

"Then he must be ready to leave in some hours."

The old guard hesitated, the words died upon his lips; he made a violent effort over himself and opened his mouth.

"In carrying away the child you carry away all the joy and all the hope of this house; I have grown accustomed to love him, and now that I no longer have but a few years to live, I cannot bend myself to the idea of losing him. Shall I see him no more?"

Belle-Rose took the guard's hand and pressed it.

"You will see him always, if you wish."

"What is it necessary for me to do?" exclaimed Simon.

"I shall take him to the convent of St. Claire d'Ennery."

The guard trembled.

"To the Abbey of St. Claire!" he repeated. "Well, I will follow you there, and I will find, with Madame de Châteaufort's aid, a cottage like this, and every day I shall see Gaston."

"You call him Gaston?" exclaimed Belle-Rose, who recollected Monsieur d'Assonville.

"It is the duchess who has wished it. A gentleman's name, in faith, and one which he carries well. Hey! Gaston!" continued the guard, opening the cottage door, "come this way; here is an honest soldier who is going to take you on your first journey."

The beautiful child who had served as Belle-Rose's guide entered.

"After my first journey, you will do well to take me on my first campaign," said he.

CHAPTER XLVII.

A SPY.

Before returning to St. Claire d'Ennery, Belle-Rose had to go to Paris, where he had left the papers which the Duchess de Châteaufort had confided to him, and which stated Gaston's position. Belle-Rose had confided them to Monsieur Mériset, who had hastened to secure them in a secret closet where he concealed his money. These papers were sealed with the duchess' arms. Monsieur Mériset never saw them without thinking of the numerous adventures of Belle-Rose, and he drew from them, as usual, the conclusion that Belle-Rose was certainly one of the most considerable personages in the country.

"When he becomes prime minister," said he, by way of peroration, "I will ask of him a place as concierge in a royal château."

The frank and open air of Belle-Rose had charmed the little Gaston, who had at once conceived a great friendship for him. Gaston wished to mount a horse for going to Paris; the idea of traveling like a soldier gave him an extreme pleasure; Belle-Rose hesitated to gratify him, fearing for him the fatigues of the road; but Déroute, who desired to gain the good will of the little fellow, overcame all objections; while they were still arguing, he found in the neighborhood a small horse upon which he placed Gaston, whip in hand. The old guard embraced his dear child and swore to Belle-Rose that he would reach St. Claire d'Ennery before him, and the cavalcade took the road to Paris by way of Chevreuse and Sceaux. It was near midnight when Belle-Rose entered the great city; there was no one in the streets unless it was some gallant here and there going to his mistress' lodging; occasionally some lights were seen shining behind the blinds, but noises were rare and the lights discreet. It was the hour of Venus.

"The moment is propitious," said Belle-Rose to Déroute, "I can without risk knock at our friend Monsieur Mériset's. No one believes that I am at Paris, and if, perchance, my presence should be suspected, it is not at this hour that they would come to seek me."

"And besides, should some one meet you, how could

they recognize you, in company with this little fellow? This child is our providence."

But providence slept with all his heart. Déroute had seated him before him and was sustaining him between his arms. When they were near the Barriere du Maine, Belle-Rose got down off his horse.

"You are going to the Rue du Roi-de-Sicile, to Monsieur de Pomereux's," said he to the sergeant; "whatever happens, you will be in safety there."

"And you?"

"I am going to the honest Monsieur Mériset's."

"Alone?"

"No, with my sword."

"On foot?"

"Certainly! the shoes of a horse are indiscreet; they will tell the whole quarter whence I come and whither I am going."

Déroute looked turn by turn at the captain and the child.

"Supposing we all three go there," he finally said.

"My honest sergeant," replied Belle-Rose, "that would be to expose the little fellow without any profit to us."

He threw his horse's bridle to Déroute, and while the one was taking his way to the Rue du Roi-de-Sicile by way of the Rue St. Jacques, the other took the direction of the Rue du Pot-de-Fer St. Sulpice. The night was dark; a great wind was blowing which chased the huge clouds across the sky; the weather-cocks were creaking upon the roofs, and the ill-adjusted planks of the old doors creaked upon their trembling hinges. At times immovable stars were seen to sparkle between the rents in the clouds. Belle-Rose drew his cloak around his shoulders, saw to it that his sword and poniard played freely in their scabbards, and plunged into the Faubourg St. Germain. He reached the Rue du Pot-de-Fer St. Sulpice by way of the Rue de Vangirard. As he turned the corner of the street, he saw a man concealed under a porch, and sleeping with his cloak rolled around him and his hat drawn down over his eyes. Belle-Rose thought that it was a lackey who had fallen there on leaving some cabaret, and he passed on. The house of the honest Monsieur Mériset seemed, at this advanced hour of the night, the most silent of all the silent houses of the quarter; the shutters were well closed, and not a ray of light came through their interstices. Belle-Rose raised the knocker and struck. At the third stroke the shutter of a window fashioned above the door slowly opened, and the patriarchal head of Monsieur

Mériset was seen leaning forward, protecting with his hand the flame of a candle.

"Who goes there?" said he, in a somewhat disturbed voice.

"Descend quickly!" murmured Belle-Rose, "I will tell you when you are closer."

On hearing this well-known voice, Monsieur Mériset hastily closed the shutter, and ran to the stair-way. But at the same time that he was a thoroughly devoted man, Monsieur Mériset was a very prudent proprietor. Not being quite sure of the acuteness of his hearing, and wishing to avoid any disagreeable surprise, he opened a peep-hole cut in the door and looked at his interlocutor. Belle-Rose was also being looked at by a third personage, whose presence he did not suspect in this part of the Rue du Pot-de-Fer. This personage was no other than the lackey whom he had seen sleeping under a porch. At the first stroke of the knocker the sleeper opened his eyes; at the second, he straightened himself up to learn whence the noise came; at the third, he walked in the direction of Monsieur Mériset's house. From the manner in which he set his feet upon the ground, keeping close to the wall, it was evident that the pretended lackey had some interest not to be perceived. The end of a long rapier protruded from his cloak, and at the moment when he had risen, a pair of pistols had shone in company with a poniard in his leathern belt. From door to door, this rascal gained an obscure corner from which it was easy for him to see without being seen. When the light fell full upon the nocturnal visitor, the spy leaned forward and examined him curiously. But Belle-Rose turned his back to him, and he could only distinguish the outlines of his form.

"Is it indeed you?" asked the suspicious proprietor.

—"Look quickly and open quickly," Belle-Rose answered him, uncovering his face.

Monsieur Mériset smiled and drew the bolts. The spy had heard nothing, these words having been pronounced quite low; but the smile and action of Monsieur Mériset did not escape him. He very wisely concluded from it that the visitor was one of the frequenters of the house, and that he must have some urgent affair to arrive at this hour. The door half opened and Belle-Rose passed through it; but in shutting it, he turned toward the street, and the light which Monsieur Mériset held in his hand suddenly lit up the face of Belle-Rose, whose cloak had not been

drawn up around him again. It was like an apparition; but the spy, who had seen all, trembled in his corner.

"It is he!" he murmured.

The door was closed, and he rushed into the street. In three bounds he had reached the corner of the Rue du Vieux-Colombier, and looked around him; the street was black and silent. No other noise was to be heard there except the moaning of the wind as it whistled between the chimneys. The spy drew a whistle from his pocket and blew softly a first time, then a little stronger a second, then finally very strong a third, putting a minute or two's interval between each whistle. No one answered this appeal. The spy stamped his foot.

"The scoundrel," said he, "must have gone and got drunk in some cabaret! Unless he has gone to sleep in some corner," he added.

The spy searched in every direction; he did not find any one. He returned to the corner of the Rue du Pot-de-Fer, and moved about hesitatingly for some minutes; sometimes he made thirty steps running in the direction of the Rue du Vieux-Colombier, sometimes he turned back in haste toward the house of Monsieur Mériset. His irresolute mind delivered itself up to an inward soliloquy.

"If I go to seek assistance," thought he, "for investing the house and seizing Belle-Rose, he may disappear during my absence. But if I remain, it is clear that I alone, agile and strong as he is, will never succeed in getting possession of his person. Why the devil is Robert not at his post?"

The spy again took up his instrument and whistled. But Robert did not make his appearance. The spy put the whistle in his pocket, fearing, if he used it again, to attract Belle-Rose's attention; and decided to remain on the watch in the somber corner which he had quitted at the moment of the captain's entrance in his ancient lodging.

"When he leaves," he said to himself, "if no one has come, I will follow him, and I will find on the route some of our men who can aid me to take him or kill him."

The spy pressed close to the wall and remained completely immovable. Meanwhile Belle-Rose had followed Monsieur Mériset into the room where he had slept so often.

"I have not a long time to stay with you," he said to him, "as I am only going through Paris——"

"What! not even to-night?" exclaimed the honest proprietor, whose weakness for Belle-Rose we know.

"Not even an hour; I only come to withdraw from your hands certain papers which I confided to you some time ago."

"They are in my room near here."

"You are going, then, if you please, to get them and bring them to me."

"At least," said Monsieur Mériset, rising, "you will do me the honor to accept a slice of pasty and drink a glass of Burgundy which I make use of only on great occasions."

The walk and the open air had given Belle-Rose an appetite; he accepted the offer of Monsieur Mériset, who ran to seek the pasty, the bottle, and the papers. Belle-Rose slipped the papers in his pocket, made a breach in the pasty, drank a glass of wine and cordially embraced the kind old man.

"Now I leave, my dear Monsieur Mériset," he said to him.

"For a long time?"

"I do not know."

"That is true; when one has so many affairs——"

"It is less the quantity than the quality, my dear host, and mine are of a very delicate nature."

Monsieur Mériset shook his head with a grave and mysterious air and took the flambeau in order to light Belle-Rose down the stair-way. The little supper to which the proprietor had invited the captain had delayed Belle-Rose's departure by an hour. The rain had fallen during the repast, and the shivering spy had not moved from the corner where he had concealed himself.

"If I contract the fever," said he, pressing the handle of his poniard, "he will have to pay me for it."

As to Robert, he had not been seen. At last the door opened, the spy held his breath, and Belle-Rose came forth. The sky began to brighten, and between the clouds were to be seen large strips of a deep blue. Belle-Rose entered the Rue des Cannettes and took through the Rue du Four the way to the Carrefour Buci; he walked rapidly and brusquely turned the street corners.

"This man is not worrying about an exile and knows where he is going," said the spy to himself.

Belle-Rose looked before him; the spy was glancing in all directions, seeking a comrade, but the cabarets were closed; Paris seemed deserted. Two o'clock had just struck at the Sorbonne. At the corner of the Rue St. Andre-des-Arts, they met some robbers about to force a shop; a little farther on, in the Rue Pavée, they saw a

student climbing to a balcony by means of a ladder. Belle-Rose had no time to disturb the thieves or the lover; he passed on. The spy followed him. As he reached the quay, Belle-Rose thought he heard walking a hundred steps behind him; he turned back and saw nothing; at the end of the Pont St. Michel the same noise was renewed; this time Belle-Rose perceived a black shadow defiling along the parapet.

"I am being followed," thought Belle-Rose.

In order to assure himself of it, instead of going through the Rue de la Barillerie, he turned the corner of the Rue de la Calandre and stopped at that part which borders on the Rue de la Juiverie. Belle-Rose placed his hand upon the guard of his poniard, half opened his cloak so as to be ready in case of attack, and took his way toward the Pont Notre-Dame. The spy had observed nothing, but in passing through the Rue de la Lanterne, which debouches on the quay, he perceived behind the windows of an ill-closed cabaret one of his comrades drinking. He entered and struck him upon the shoulder.

"Hey! Gargonille," he whispered to him, "I am on his track; run to Monsieur de Charny's and awaken him."

"Our man is at Paris?" exclaimed Gargonille, rising.

"I am following him; from the road he takes, I do not doubt but what he is going to Monsieur de Pomereux's; he will be there as in a mouse-trap. Run!"

The two acolytes followed together to the Pont Notre-Dame, at the end of which one took to the left and the other to the right. Belle-Rose, who was listening, heard the tramp of Gargonille who was moving away through the Rue Planche-Mibray, while the spy was advancing in the direction of the Place de l'Hôtel-de-Ville. Belle-Rose, quite sure of his point this time, came to an immediate decision. He entered with a more rapid step into the Rue de l'Epine, threw himself into the Rue de la Tixéranderie and concealed himself in the shadow of a door which formed the corner of the Rue des Coquilles. In spite of the light shed by the stars, this quarter, one of the muddiest and blackest in Paris, was somber and lugubrious. The spy, who feared to lose track of Belle-Rose, hastened on and entered the Rue de la Tixéranderie at the moment when Belle-Rose stopped at the corner of the Rue des Coquilles; he made some steps forward, but no longer hearing footsteps, stopped himself. Belle-Rose waited for him, poniard in hand; some moments passed in this reciprocal immobility; but the captain, who did not know

what the rascal whom the spy had enlisted on the way, had gone to seek, decided to act first. He emerged from his hiding-place and walked resolutely toward the spy; the spy, who was upon his guard, raised a pistol which he had in his hand and pressed the trigger; but the rain had moistened the powder and it missed fire. Belle-Rose pounced upon the spy, who only had time to arm himself with a poniard. The struggle was short and decisive; endowed with a terrible strength, Belle-Rose seized the spy and plunged his poniard up to the guard in his breast. The man fell, uttering a cry of despair. A terrible cry answered this cry. Belle-Rose listened and heard in the direction of the Rue des Arcis the noise of a troop of archers who were coming up; he threw aside his cloak and ran toward the Rue du Roi-de-Sicile by way of the Rue de la Verrerie.

In three minutes he reached Monsieur de Pomereux's hotel, climbed to the balcony, split the blinds, broke the window, and bounded into the apartment. At the same moment a shot was fired in the street; the ball struck the sash behind Belle-Rose. At this brusque detonation, Monsieur de Pomereux, who was talking with Déroute before the chimney, seized his sword.

"Belle-Rose!" exclaimed he, at sight of the captain.

Belle-Rose threw his bloody poniard upon the carpet.

"Monsieur le Comte," he said to him, "I come in the name of Gabrielle to ask you for hospitality."

CHAPTER XLVIII.

TO CONQUER OR DIE.

Monsieur de Pomereux divined from Belle-Rose's words that the danger was great; coming from a man of courage, they indicated the certainty of an imminent peril. The count seized the captain's hand and pressed it.

"You have pronounced a name which makes you inviolable," he said to him.

Déroute had thrown himself upon the balcony and was looking into the street. By the uncertain light of the stars, he perceived four or five men moving about and speaking in low tones; he listened and could hear some words of their conversation.

"It is here——"

"Parbleu! he has climbed along the wall like a cat——"

"I have heard the fall of the glass which he has broken ——"

"If he had staid a moment longer upon the balcony, I would have put this musket-ball in his back; but he disappeared just as my finger was pressing the trigger."

Another ran up from the end of the street.

"And Landry?" some one asked him.

"He is dead, and I have left him in the gutter."

"In faith, 'tis necessary to wait," said one who appeared to be the chief of the band and who held a naked sword in his hand.

Just as Gargonille had quitted him whom they called Landry he had taken his course toward Monsieur de Louvois' hotel. At the corner of the Rue des Lombards he had met a troop of soldiers and had sent them to the Rue du Roi-de-Sicile, where his comrade and he supposed that Belle-Rose would go.

The police reached the Rue de la Tixéranderie just as Landry fell under the poniard of Belle-Rose; at the cry of the wounded man, the whole troop threw itself upon the fugitive's track; Landry made a desperate effort to point to them with a gesture the direction which he had followed, but Belle-Rose was a hundred steps in advance of them, and the reader has seen how he entered Monsieur de Pomereux's hotel.

"Your bandits are there?" said Déroute, turning toward the captain.

"The street belongs to everybody, but the hotel is mine," said the count, proudly.

"Let me take my pistols, and I will charge all this canaille," said the sergeant.

"Sorties are not made before the siege has begun," said Monsieur de Pomereux, smiling. "Before fighting we will parley."

Déroute shoved his pistols back into their belt and returned to the window; concealed behind the blinds, he could see everything without being seen. A change had taken place in the enemy's maneuvers; there were no longer but two men before the great door; the others were scattered around the hotel, watching over each issue.

"The place is invested," said Déroute, his face turned toward the count, "must we open fire?"

"Eh! no, mordieu! do you not know how to find in your mind other resources than battles?" exclaimed the count.

Belle-Rose inquired about Gaston.

"Oh!" said Déroute, "the little man is about to go to sleep for twenty-four hours if we leave him alone."

While he was still speaking, the precipitate gallop of a horse was heard in the street. The cat-like eyes of Déroute had at once recognized the rider.

"Monsieur de Charny!" he murmured.

"It is well," said Monsieur de Pomereux; "the tiger after the wolves."

Three seconds after a violent blow shook the door of the hotel; another blow immediately followed it.

"Jean," said the count, addressing himself to one of his lackeys, "take a flambeau, open the door, and bring to me the person who is knocking."

The lackey bowed and went out.

"What!" exclaimed Déroute, "you introduce the enemy into the place?"

"As you see, my comrade, and, moreover, I place the garrison under arrest."

Déroute looked at the count with all his eyes.

"Under arrest, did you say?"

"There, in the next room, where you are going along with Belle-Rose," said Monsieur de Pomereux.

As he said this, he opened a concealed door and introduced the captain and the sergeant into a little room where there was a small bed.

"Dream, meditate, or sleep if you wish," he added, turning to Déroute; "but above all, only speak in case you are questioned."

The count again pressed the hand of Belle-Rose and closed the door upon him. Inside, the noise of steps was heard upon the stair-way.

"Monsieur de Charny!" cried the lackey, stepping back to make way for the favorite.

Monsieur de Pomereux pointed out a fauteuil near the chimney.

"It is a little late to make a visit, monsieur," said he to Monsieur de Charny; "but your visits are so rare that I do not disturb myself over the hour which you choose."

"It is not a visit, monsieur le comte, it is an affair which brings me," replied Monsieur de Charny.

"The motive matters little, your presence suffices me and you are welcome."

"I imagine, monsieur, that you know the grave reason which has brought me to your hotel at such an advanced hour of the night?"

"My God! my dear Monsieur de Charny, you are such a

deep politician, and I am such a shallow one, that it would be best to at once explain your reasons. I might seek three hours and find nothing after all, if you abandon me to my unaided meditations."

Monsieur de Charny understood that Monsieur de Pomereux was jesting, but he restrained himself.

"Then, monsieur," said he, "I will be brief."

"I am all ears, monsieur."

"A man has taken refuge in your house to-night."

"It would be more exact to say that one of my friends has paid me a visit; visits, you know, are made at all hours."

"This man is in rebellion against the laws of the kingdom."

"My God! laws are sometimes so complacent!"

"He has rebelled against the authority of the minister who represents the king."

"What pleases me in you, Monsieur de Charny, is that you cannot be accused of flattering royalty. It is very beautiful in a time when there are so many insincere people."

"Just now," continued Monsieur de Charny, who was resolved not to be stopped by the count's epigrams, "this man has killed near here one of His Majesty's soldiers."

"Pardon, my dear Monsieur de Charmy, are you quite sure that he was a soldier? Are soldiers accustomed to prowl at night upon the heels of people like pickpockets? If there is some new ordinance on this subject, I feel a curiosity to know it."

"After this assassination——"

"A duel, monsieur."

"After this assassination," repeated Monsieur de Charny, coldly, "the murderer has thrown himself into your hotel, where you have welcomed him."

"In faith, my dear sir, I acknowledge that I am not accustomed to put out at the door those who come to see me."

"This man is here."

"I believe even that he intends to pass the night here."

"Now, monsieur le comte, I come to arrest this criminal of state, and you will deliver him to me at once."

As he said this, Monsieur de Charny arose; Monsieur de Pomereux remained upon his fauteuil.

"Monsieur," said he, with the air of a man profoundly astonished, "there is in all this a grave error, and I insist

on explaining it. Have you the leisure to give me three minutes?"

Monsieur de Charny looked at the count, not divining what his intentions were, but suspecting a snare under these words.

"Speak, monsieur," said he.

"Oh! I shall be brief like you—but sit down; I am much fatigued, and if you remain standing, you will oblige me to rise, which would inconvenience me much."

Monsieur de Charny sat down again, and anger began to shine in his eyes.

"It is indeed to Monsieur de Charny that I have the honor of speaking?" continued Monsieur de Pomereux.

Monsieur de Charny leaped in his chair.

"Are you in a humor to jest, monsieur?" he exclaimed.

"No, I am in a humor to talk, if you permit it."

"What signifies, then, this question?"

"It signifies that Monsieur de Charny, the honorable Monsieur de Charny whom I have often had the pleasure to meet at Monsieur de Louvois', being neither councilor in Parliament, nor procure at the Chatelet, having finally no judiciary charge, has no mission to arrest any one."

Monsieur de Charny bit his lips.

"Nevertheless," continued Monsieur de Pomereux, with the same *sang-froid*, "if, during the time which I have been deprived of your company, you have entered the magistracy, inform me of it, and you will see me thoroughly disposed to come to an understanding with you."

"Eh! monsieur! it is not necessary to wear the gown to have the right to arrest a scoundrel!" exclaimed Monsieur de Charny.

"This scoundrel is one of my friends, monsieur, and if I consent to deliver him up, ought I not to do it only to the proper authorities?"

"Well, do I not belong to Monseiur de Louvois' household?"

"Certainly."

"Have I not all his confidence?"

"So they say."

"Has he not charged me with a hundred missions more important than this one?"

"Certainly."

"And you still hesitate?"

"Not the least in the world."

"At last!" exclaimed Monsieur de Charny, like a man relieved of a great weight.

"When one is on such good terms with so great a minister, one has always upon one's person a little order, a sealed letter, some light trifle. Exhibit to me your powers, and everything will be arranged to our mutual satisfaction."

Monsieur de Charny was already pale; fury rendered him livid. Monsieur de Pomereux, who fixed upon him a piercing look, had guessed rightly; in his haste to follow Gargonille, Monsieur de Charny had not provided himself with any paper which could confer on him an official power.

"I am waiting," said the count.

Monsieur de Charny rose at a bound.

"Then you refuse?" exclaimed he, in a voice trembling with anger.

"Have I said anything to you which resembled a refusal?" replied Monsieur de Pomereux, without quitting his fauteuil.

"Take care, monsieur le comte, you are playing a dangerous game," said Monsieur de Charny. "Belle-Rose is here, quite close to us, perhaps; he is a criminal of state; you receive him and conceal him in your house, so that you are ignorant of nothing which has taken place. In an hour the minister will know all. You are risking your head, monsieur."

Scarcely had Monsieur de Charny finished these words when the door opened violently and gave passage to Belle-Rose. Belle-Rose had heard everything. At Monsieur de Charny's threat, the loyalty of his character had revolted; he could claim Monsieur de Pomereux's aid when it was a question of a child to return to its mother, but he ought not to expose this proud gentleman to perils when his head was at stake.

"Thanks, monsieur le comte," said he, pressing the young man's hand, "you have been firm and loyal to the end; you have done your duty, I will do mine."

And turning to Monsieur de Charny:

"I follow you, monsieur, but watch well over me, for at the first step outside of this house, I shall have the sword in one hand and the pistol in the other."

Déroute had slipped behind the captain, his two hands upon his weapons, ready for everything. Monsieur de Charny smiled with an air of triumph; he picked up his hat, saluted Monsieur de Pomereux and took his way toward the door.

"Come, then, monsieur," said he to Belle-Rose.

But Monsieur de Pomereux had already placed himself between Belle-Rose and Monsieur de Charny.

"You are my guest!" he exclaimed, in a sonorous voice; "if a hair of your head fell, my honor would be lost. Remain. I wish it!"

Monsieur de Pomereux's tone, action, and look caused Belle-Rose to hesitate and stop. Monsieur de Charny bounded toward him like a tiger.

"Still you? take care!" he exclaimed.

The count covered the confidant of the minister with his disdainful glance.

"Belle-Rose," added he, turning toward his friend, "you have entered my home safe and sound, you will leave it free and living."

"But your head is in peril!"

"Do you prefer my honor to perish?"

Anger made Monsieur de Charny tremble.

"Ah! it is a sealed letter which you want!" said he, "you shall have two of them."

Monsieur de Pomereux shrugged his shoulders.

"If you had drawn an order from your pocket, I would have blown out your brains, that is all," he said to him.

"After me, there is Monsieur de Louvois," replied the favorite.

"After me, there is the Prince de Condé," replied Monsieur de Pomereux.

Monsieur de Charny looked around him like a wild beast; his eyes rested upon the balcony, and he asked himself if he would not do well to call the police to his aid to finish everything at a stroke. Déroute divined his thought from the expression of his looks, and leaned against the window with a tranquil air. Monsieur de Charny threw him a viper-like glance and did not move. There was a moment's silence, during which each one was on the alert. Monsieur de Charny did not wish to go away, fearing that, during his absence, Belle-Rose might escape by a secret exit of the hotel; Monsieur de Pomereux desired on his side to keep Monsieur de Charny in his power, but everybody understood that it was necessary to end this violent situation. It was Monsieur de Pomereux who first broke silence.

"All that which has just taken place," said he, with a perfect ease, "ought to prove to us all that each of us here has a firm will. You, Monsieur de Charny, wish Belle-Rose dead or alive; you, Belle-Rose, are decided to fight to the

last drop of your blood; I see over there my friend Déroute, who is also of this opinion."

"Certainly," said the sergeant.

"As to myself," continued the count, "I am thoroughly resolved to not suffer Monsieur de Charny to assail the liberty of my guest."

"If I uttered a cry, my men would invade the hotel," said the confidant.

"Do so, I have thirty lackeys armed to the teeth, and among them there are some who wear the livery of the Prince de Condé."

"Monsieur de Charny was silent.

"I see, monsieur, that you are convinced, like myself, of the inefficiency of that means; let us seek another, then. An idea has just now struck me, and this is it."

All eyes were turned toward Monsieur de Pomereux, who spoke as if he had been at the corner of his fire after supper.

"The quarrel is between Belle-Rose and Monsieur de Charny," continued he; "each of them has his sword; let them draw it and fight. Déroute and I will serve as witnesses."

"And what will be the result of this duel with closed doors?" asked Monsieur de Charny, while Belle-Rose was drawing his sword from the scabbard.

"Parbleu! you ask me a pleasant question, my dear Monsieur de Charny. If Belle-Rose kills you, it is clear that you will no longer prevent him from going where it seems good to him; if, on the contrary, you kill him, it will make little difference after should you take him to the Bastile."

"Very well, Monsieur le Comte; but if, perchance, I refuse to fight?"

"Oh! then it would be more simple still! I would consider you as an adventurer who, after having stationed in the street, for I know not what bad purpose, a lot of bandits, has introduced himself, under a miserable pretext, into my domicile, in order to carry on there an abominable espionage; consequently, I would have you seized by one of my men, and you would be very quickly bound."

Monsieur de Charny understood from the count's air that he was not jesting. He came, then, to an immediate decision, like a man who has some courage and who knows how to risk his life when it is necessary. He slowly drew his sword and put himself on guard.

"I am ready," said he.

"Go, then, messieurs," said the count.

The two swords were immediately crossed. Monsieur de Pomereux, who had seen Belle-Rose put to the test, had no fear as to the result of this duel; but from the manner in which Monsieur de Charny fought, he understood that the adversary was worthy of the captain, and for a moment he regretted having brought about the combat. At the first attack Belle-Rose divined the strength of Monsieur de Charny; he measured his thrusts, feigned to break, and when his adversary fell upon him, he resumed fencing with such violence that the blade flew from the hands of Monsieur de Charny. Monsieur de Pomereux was completely reassured. Déroute picked up the sword and handed it to Monsieur de Charny, who immediately resumed guard, and the duel began again. This time Belle-Rose, master of his adversary's play, attacked in his turn; just as Monsieur de Charny essayed a parry and thrust, he caught his sword and sent it up to the ceiling. Monsieur de Charny became as white as a corpse. He rushed to his weapon, grasped it, and returned to the charge with an incredible fury. Belle-Rose parried all his thrusts; at last, Monsieur de Charny having extended his sword in a feint, Belle-Rose so resolutely took possession of it that it fell at ten steps from them. At this third disarming, Monsieur de Charny shivered from head to foot.

"But strike, then!" he exclaimed, drunk with anger.

"People do not kill spies," answered Belle-Rose.

And taking Monsieur de Charny's sword, he broke it upon his knee. Monsieur de Charny's eyes became bloodshot, and he fell upon a chair.

"In faith, monsieur, you are conquered," Monsieur de Pomereux said to him. "Permit me to act as if you were dead."

The count rang a bell, and a lackey presented himself.

"Labrauche," he said to him, "run to the stable, and say to the grooms to make ready the carriage and harness the horses; we leave for Chantilly."

This last word awoke Monsieur de Charny as if from a dream.

"You leave for Chantilly?" he exclaimed, rising.

"In faith, yes."

"Alone, then, I imagine."

"You forget, my dear Monsieur de Charny, that you are not in condition to address questions to me; but, neverthe-

less, I will answer you. You are anxious to know if I am going to Chantilly?"

"Yes," said the favorite.

"My God! how much alive you are, then, for a man killed! To tell the truth, I do not like to travel alone, and, if you permit it, I will take with me Belle-Rose and my friend Déroute."

"This is too much, and I will not suffer it."

Monsieur de Charny rushed toward the window, but Monsieur de Pomereux stopped him on the way.

"Listen, monsieur," he said to him, in a firm voice, "I am master here, being at my own home. You have come without an order and without title for I know not what mission which you have not the right to exercise. Your bandits have fired upon my house, the house of a gentleman. I could have had you caned by my people and thrown into the street, but I have not done it. You have fought, you have been conquered, for me you are dead; recollect our conditions. If now you say a word, if you cry out, if you call, on my faith as a gentleman, I will blow our your brains."

Monsieur de Pomereux took a pistol and loaded it. He was slightly pale and no longer laughed. There was a moment's terrible silence. Monsieur de Charny did not fear death, but if death struck him, the hope of vengeance escaped him. He looked at Monsieur de Pomereux the space of a second. The count's face expressed a cold resolution, and there was no doubt but what he would execute his threat at the first cry. Monsieur de Charny was silent and sat down.

"Monsieur le comte's carriage is ready!" cried Labrauche, opening the door.

Déroute disappeared for a moment upon a sign from Belle-Rose and came back, holding in his arms the little Gaston who was sleeping peaceably.

"Follow me, my friends, and you, monsieur, go in front," added he, turning to Monsieur de Charny.

They descended the great stair-way. When they reached the bottom, Monsieur de Pomereux turned to his people.

"I confide this gentleman to you," said he to them, designating Monsieur de Charny. "In an hour you will open to him the doors of the hotel."

The lackeys bowed, and they passed on. The carriage with the arms of the Prince de Condé was waiting for them. Monsieur de Pomereux made Belle-Rose, Déroute, and the child mount within; he himself sat down near them.

"Go!" said he.

The great door of the hotel revolved upon its hinges the grooms started at a gallop, the carriage followed them, and all the escort moved off in the midst of noise and flashes of light. The police were waiting in the street. At sight of the carriage on which the escutcheon with the three golden fleurs de lis sparkled, they hesitated.

"Make way for the carriage of the Prince de Condé!" cried the grooms, whose horses were neighing and prancing.

The dazzled archers made way, and the procession passed rapidly on.

"All the same, my dear," said Monsieur de Pomereux to Belle-Rose, when they had turned the corner of the Rue du Roi-de-Sicile, "I believe that you would have done better to kill Monsieur de Charny."

CHAPTER XLIX.

THE SPRING OF 1672.

Instead of making for Chantilly, Monsieur de Pomereux's carriage, as soon as they had passed beyond St. Denis, turned in the direction of Pontoise. Gaston, who had opened his eyes for a moment, closed them soon and went to sleep again. Déroute rubbed his hands and looked at times in the direction of Paris.

"In faith, captain," said he, when they were in the open country, "perhaps Monsieur de Pomereux was right, but I acknowledge that the furious and despairing face of Monsieur de Charny filled me with joy; he was upon his chair, white as a specter, and galling the palm of his hands with his nails."

The sun had been shining for two or three hours when the foaming team drew up before the doors of the abbey. Grippard was the first to notice the arrival of the carriage. Suzanne, warned by him, ran to meet Belle-Rose.

"It is to Monsieur de Pomereux that I am indebted for seeing you again," said the captain, presenting the count to his wife.

Suzanne took Monsieur de Pomereux's hands between hers.

"Once again!" she exclaimed; "you are lavish of devotion."

"What would you, madame!" replied the count, "when I venture to have a virtue, I must always be exposed to a defeat."

Gaston looked at everything with a serious air, holding by the hand his friend Déroute. Belle-Rose led him to Suzanne.

"Behold," said he, "the motive of my absence."

Suzanne leaned over the child and kissed him.

"It is Monsieur d'Assonville's son," added Belle-Rose.

"Monsieur d'Assonville's son!" exclaimed Suzanne; "oh! I love him already."

It was the hour when the abbess of St. Claire d'Ennery was to be found in her oratory after the morning services. Belle-Rose sent to ask for a conversation, taking Gaston with him. As he entered the oratory, Genevieve uttered a cry which had an echo in the heart of the soldier; she took the child in her arms and covered it with kisses.

"You have given me more than life," said she, quite low, to Belle-Rose, "you have given me peace."

Some months passed in a profound solitude; the days fled like the pure water of a stream between verdant shores; happiness filled them all. Nevertheless it sometimes happened that Belle-Rose looked with a dreamy air at the great horizons where the steeples of the distant cities were drowned in the mist. When, perchance, a squadron passed through the country, clarions at the head and flag floating in the wind, he followed with his eyes the warlike march; his cheeks colored at the aspect of the shining arms and superb horses; his nostrils quivered, and when the squadron disappeared behind a fold of ground, he still listened to the fanfares and sought in space the shadow of the floating flags. On these days Belle-Rose remained sad and care-worn. All these brave soldiers going so proudly to the war had before them glory, titles, and honors.

About this time Suzanne gave birth to a little girl. The child was held over the baptismal font by Genevieve, who gave it its name. Belle-Rose forgot his warlike ideas for a moment, but soon returned to them. Meanwhile the spring of 1672 was passing. France was powerful and prosperous within, feared and respected without. Her influence dominated Europe. She had the authority of genius and the preponderance of arms. If for a moment, toward the beginning of 1668, she had been constrained to recoil before the quadruple alliance of Spain, Holland, England, and Sweden, and to consent to the treaty of Aix-la-

Chapelle, stopped in the heart of her conquests by that formidable league, she had conceived the hope and presentiment of her victories to come. Louis XIV. had forgotten nothing. In the midst of the magnificence of his reign and the pomp of a court which was unrivaled in the universe, he recollected that mortal insult made him by Van Benning, schevin of Amsterdam. While a crowd of gentlemen filled the galleries of Versailles and St. Germain, the gazetteers of Holland spared the young king neither disdain nor sarcasm. Outrageous medals had been struck, and it was said that upon one of them Van Benning had represented him along with a sun and this device in exergue: "In conspectu meo stetit sol." Louis XIV. was waiting. He knew that his hour was near at hand, and he wished a splendid vengeance. From 1668 to 1672 was spent in preparations. Astonished Europe and disturbed Holland watched them. War was to be felt in the air, and no one knew where it would burst out. The flag of France floated upon all the seas. The admirals were Tourville, Duquesne, d'Estrées; the chiefs of squadron, Jean Bart and Duquay-Trouin. The Maréchal de Créqui punished the Duc de Lorraine. The province is conquered in the midst of a profound peace, and France cuts off all communication between Franche-Comté and the Low Countries. It was already much but not enough. It was necessary to detach the King of England, Charles II., from the Dutch alliance brought about by the Chevalier Temple. It is the Duchess of Orleans, his sister, the young and beautiful Henriette, who charges herself with the negotiations. Her journey was a triumphal march. The court of Charles II. was the most gallant and dissolute in the world. The skillfulness of Colbert, Croisy and the influence of Henriette triumphed over the true interests of English politics, and by three successive treaties, King Charles II. promises fifty vessels and six thousand men for continental war. He will get three millions a year, and the nation some of the Dutch isles.

The indefatigable activity of Louvois, who was a great minister in spite of his defects, had brought the army up to a hundred and eighty thousand men; never had it been so strong and so well organized; he had provided it with a formidable instrument of death, the bayonet, and the most severe discipline reigned among the troops. As to the generals, they were the same who, in 1668, had conquered the whole of Spanish Flanders in two months—Créqui, Turrenne, Condé, Grammont, and Luxembourg. Every-

thing was ready for war; France had her hand upon the guard of her sword. Meanwhile Holland, confiding in her lagoons and her dykes, let fall into ruin her dismantled fortifications; the party of the rigid republicans triumphed; the two brothers DeWitt and the great Ruyter, who saw in Holland only an isle, governed, and thinking only of the sea, disdained the army, composed at most of twenty-five thousand bad soldiers. At every hour French regiments took their way to the frontier places where the fire was going to be lighted. Arras, Bethune, le Quesnoy, Laudrecies, Maubeuge, St. Pal, St. Omer were incumbered with troops. Something of all these noises reached the ears of Belle-Rose, to whom the sentiment of his inaction was crushing; he asked everywhere and on all occasions for details of the preparations which gave to the kingdom the appearance of a warlike hive. Monsieur de Pomereux, who visited him at times in his retreat, related to him all that which was said at Versailles and Chantilly of the king's plans; he spoke to him of the camps which were on the banks of the Sambre and of the intoxication which possessed the whole people. Enthusiasm was everywhere. Each day increased the fever which consumed Belle-Rose. In the position in which he was placed by events, repose was destroying him. Monsieur de Louvois was not one of those men in whom time wears out the memory; for combating and conquering his animosity, a rival animosity was necessary; the struggle might lessen, if not destroy his hatred. Belle-Rose recalled, with a delicious agitation, the emotions and accidents of war; he saw pass before his eyes the animated and noisy picture of the camps, he heard the horses neigh and the trumpets sound. The army was his family, and war his country. Déroute, Grippard, and Cornelius shared the sentiments of Belle-Rose. They looked in the direction of the horizon, quite ready, without having said anything about it, to break their ties. Suzanne and Claudine anticipated their resolutions, without Belle-Rose and Cornelius having opened themselves to them. A last visit of Monsieur de Pomereux precipitated the dénouement. It was at the end of April, 1672.

"The Prince de Condé's equipages are ready," said he, one morning; "before three days his household will leave for Flanders."

All Belle-Rose's blood rushed to his cheeks at these words.

"So you follow him?" said he.

"Even to the Hague, if he wishes."

Belle-Rose encountered the eyes of Déroute, which shone like burning coals.

"The court is warned," continued the count; "the king will quit St. Germain on the 27th of the month; the wagons are already on the way, the relays prepared, and the musketeers have taken the front rank. The rendezvous is at Charleroi."

"At Charleroi!" exclaimed Déroute, all of whose recollections awoke at this name.

"I should wish to see you there, Belle-Rose," continued Monsieur de Pomereux; "the campaign promises to be beautiful; it would seem more so if we made it together."

Belle-Rose pressed his hand without replying, but in such a rough manner that the count did not doubt for a moment but what the captain had taken an extreme resolution.

"If you have need of me," he added, with a significant smile, "you will find me till to-morrow at Chantilly."

When Monsieur de Pomereux had left the abbey, Belle-Rose turned to Déroute.

"Déroute," he said to him, in a deep tone of voice, "we must leave."

"At last!" exclaimed the sergeant, explosively.

"I do not yet know how we will leave," continued Belle-Rose, "but I do know that we shall leave."

"To leave is nothing, to arrive is everything," observed the sergeant.

Cornelius came up just then; he saw from the air of the two interlocutors that they were discussing a grave question.

"Eh! Monsieur Irishman," exclaimed Déroute, who thus styled Cornelius in his joyous moments, "it is a plot which is brewing between us. I stake a crown against a sou that you will join us."

"It is a question of leaving," added Belle-Rose.

"I was thinking of it," said Cornelius.

The two brothers pressed each other's hand.

Grippard was called to the council; if he was not very strong in invention, he was prompt and determined in execution.

"We mount on horseback and gallop to the frontier!" exclaimed Grippard, enthusiastically.

They were still discussing when Monsieur de Charny's carriage stopped before the abbey. That somber gentleman descended from it and made his way toward that

part of the building inhabited by the Duchesse de Châteaufort. Déroute at once arose and clapped his hands.

"This evening we will be free," he exclaimed.

This was not the first time Monsieur de Charny had presented himself at the abbey; already, and under divers pretexts, he had paid visits to Madame de Châteaufort. These visits had awakened some suspicions in the mind of the sergeant, who, without communicating them to any one, held himself upon his guard. Déroute was not mistaken when he credited Monsieur de Charny with bad intentions. Monsieur de Charny never forgot anything. The hatred of Monsieur de Louvois had become his. He wished a revenge at any price. Among the lackeys who accompanied him, there were two who were specially charged with observing the inmates of the abbey, and to make preparations for a nocturnal abduction. Monsieur de Charny knew that Belle-Rose inhabited an isolated building, and it was on this that he counted for the success of his enterprise; but still, before running any chances, it was necessary to know the habits of the house. These two lackeys prowled everywhere, examining everything with a sidelong glance and making the gardeners talk. Two others groomed the horses and did not neglect to aid their comrades with their knowledge when the occasion presented itself. At the third visit, Monsieur de Charny knew all that he wished to know; at the fourth the exact topography of the place was obtained; he only needed one more to determine his plan of attack. He made this last visit on the same day Belle-Rose had resolved to escape. It was then toward the end of the month of April. The day had been fearfully warm; great clouds were massed together on the horizon; a warm and rapid wind bent the tree-tops. Monsieur de Charny's lackeys had again taken up the course of their investigations.

In three words Déroute informed Belle-Rose, Cornelius and Grippard of his plan. All adopted it.

"Now," said Déroute when they were in accord as to the means of execution, "let us have good eyes and feet."

The conspirators plunged into the gardens close behind the agents of Monsieur de Charny.

"Chut!" said Déroute when they were in an out-of-the-way place all covered with trees; "here is one of the rascals passing along the hedge; let us slip to the other side, and we will not miss him."

Belle-Rose and Cornelius followed the other, and Déroute and Grippard took by the hedge, walking noiselessly

upon the grass. When they were at the end, they stretched themselves out flat upon their stomachs in a ditch and waited, with eyes fixed upon the lackey whom they looked at through the brush wood. The lackey came up slowly; when he was three steps from them, believing himself alone, he drew a pencil from his pocket and traced some lines upon a slip of paper. He had his foot upon a tree-stump, the paper upon his knee, and his body inclined forward. Déroute and Grippard rose slowly and pounced upon the lackey, who found himself taken without having time to move.

"If you cry out, you are a dead man," Déroute said to him, making him feel the point of his poniard in the neck.

The frightened lackey was silent, and they bound him with ends of cord, of which the sergeant's pockets were full.

"This makes one!" said Deroute, after the lackey was stretched out upon the grass, with feet and hands tied.

A whistle was heard.

"That makes two!" exclaimed he.

He ran in the direction from which the whistle came, and found Belle-Rose and Cornelius securing the second lackey. The two prisoners were transported to a safe place and undressed.

"There are two more," said the sergeant to Belle-Rose, "and we will charge ourselves with those two, will we not, Grippard?"

"Parbleu!" said the corporal, who was already dressing himself.

Large drops of rain began to fall, and the day was drawing to a close when the little troop quitted the building where the two lackeys had been placed under lock and key.

Déroute and Grippard proceeded to the stables. Of the two lackeys who remained, one, fatigued by the warmth of this stifling evening, had gone to sleep under a shed; the other was strolling around the stables. The latter saw Déroute and Grippard coming; and from their costume, he took them for his two comrades.

"Come on!" he exclaimed; "we must get the horses and carriages ready."

Déroute followed the lackey, who entered under the coach-house; Grippard did not quit him. At a sign from the sergeant, he threw himself upon the lackey, making the blade of a poniard shine at two inches from his face. The lackey resigned himself at once; they despoiled him

of his clothing, and he was concealed, bound and gagged, behind some stacks of straw. As to the lackey who was asleep, they were some time in discovering him. A certain little noise which was being made in a somber corner attracted Déroute in that direction; this noise came from the sleeper, who was snoring loudly. This one also was seized, bound, and gagged before he was even thoroughly awake.

"Let us make haste," said Déroute, "it is getting dark."

The shade of night began to grow more dense; objects were distinguishable only in an uncertain light; great clouds extended their vails over the sky. The rain fell more rapidly and more heavily. In a turn of the hand, Belle-Rose and Cornelius had changed clothes; in a corner of the coach-house there were some cloaks, which they took; the horses were saddled and bridled.

"One word," cried Belle-Rose to his friends; "if we are recognized, let us all leave together; the rest concerns our pistols."

Monsieur de Charny descended. As he was going to mount within the carriage, Suzanne appeared upon the threshold of a chapel where she was accustomed to make her evening devotions. A flash of lightning, followed by a violent clap of thunder, illuminated all this scene. Suzanne divined Belle-Rose under his large felt hat; the captain pressed his finger to his lips, and she had the courage to remain immovable.

"Light the torches and leave," said Monsieur de Charny.

The team, frightened by the noises of the storm, reared at first, then plunged forward. Suzanne fell upon her knees, and the cortege disappeared in the night. At the end of five minutes it was but a spark flying in the shadows. Suzanne arose.

"My God!" said she, "watch over them."

CHAPTER L.

A PLEASANT JOURNEY.

The equipage went like the wind. At some distance from the abbey, Déroute, who was galloping at the head, saw, upon the lower side of the road, silent cavaliers enveloped in great cloaks. They rode to the carriage, recognized it for that of Monsieur de Charny, and bowed.

Belle-Rose and Cornelius ran each to one of the doors of the carriage. At the end of a quarter of an hour, Monsieur de Charny lowered one of the windows, that one which was next to Belle-Rose.

"Hey! Grain-d'Orge!" said he.

Grain-d'Orge took care not to answer, but Belle-Rose boldly pushed his horse up to the door.

"Behold him, monsieur," said he, uncovering his face.

Monsieur de Charny recognized him in the vacillating light of the torches; he uttered a cry and wished to plunge through the door, but he encountered the muzzle of a pistol in close proximity to his forehead.

"Stir and you are a dead man," Belle-Rose said to him.

Monsieur de Charny threw himself on the other side, but he found himself facing Cornelius, who saluted him in the same manner as Belle-Rose. Monsieur de Charny understood that he was taken as in a mouse-trap; he had no other arm than his sword, and lead had this time the advantage over steel. A furious imprecation burst from his lips.

"Come," said Belle-Rose, "do not get vexed, and above all, do not seek to escape. You are alone in a kind of box, we are two on horseback and well armed; your lackeys are imprisoned at the abbey; Déroute and Grippard are in front, your postilions suspect nothing; they have whips, and we have pistols. Let us talk."

Monsieur de Charny remained silent.

"The misadventure renders you taciturn, my dear Monsieur de Charny," continued Belle-Rose. "This silence gives me a lofty idea of your philosophy. It is necessary to take time as it comes. You have played well, and you have lost; it is not your fault. The plan was pretty. I have found the details in the pocket of that amiable scamp whom you were calling just now. Is it not Grain-d'Orge that you call him? Escalade, rape—nothing was lacking. Only twenty-four hours was needed to put the plan in execution. In faith, I have not wished that such a beautiful invention should be lost through my departure; I have turned the whole over to Madame de Châteaufort, who will appreciate its exquisite delicacy."

At these last words Monsieur de Charny bowed, and his face was illuminated by a bitter smile.

"The relay!" exclaimed Cornelius all at once.

Monsieur de Charny leaned out of the door; some hundred steps away a light was seen shining in the night.

The movement of Monsieur de Charny did not escape Belle-Rose.

"Monsieur," he said to him, in a firm tone, "I swear to you that I will kill you like a dog, not only at the first cry, but at the first gesture."

"And if Belle-Rose should happen to miss you, I will not miss you," added Cornelius.

Monsieur de Charny did not mistake the accent of the two cavaliers; he slunk back in a corner like a boar and did not budge any more. The relay was reached which had been prepared in advance at Franconville. The foaming horses were unharnessed; Déroute and Grippard leaped quickly into the saddle and replaced Belle-Rose and Cornelius at the doors of the carriage. They also exchanged horses with them. They kept on as far as St. Denis, where they relayed again, and the carriage continued its route to Paris. At the end of five hundred steps, Belle-Rose saluted Monsieur de Charny with his hand.

"Your company has served us as an escort," he said to him; "we owe our liberty to you, I leave you your life in exchange, and we are quits. Let us endeavor now to avoid meeting again."

During this little discourse Déroute and Grippard had cut the traces and forced the postilions to come down off their horses. Belle-Rose and his friends rode rapidly away. When Monsieur de Charny reached the Porte St. Denis no one had seen anything. The four cavaliers had fled like phantoms. As a quarter of a league from Paris, Belle-Rose had brusquely turned to the right and regained St. Denis by cuts across the country. At daybreak the four fugitives reached Chantilly, where they asked for Monsieur de Pomereux. That young gentleman was breakfasting gayly, all booted and spurred; he received Belle-Rose with open arms.

"Parbleu!" he exclaimed, "I was expecting you. I didn't know how you would do it, but I was almost sure that you would arrive."

When he was told how they had succeeded in leaving the abbey, Monsieur de Pomereux laughed with all his heart.

"It is unfortunate," he added, "that he has not defended himself, for you would have had an excuse to kill him."

The death of Monsieur de Charny was decidedly the fixed idea of Monsieur de Pomereux. Chantilly was incumbered with gentlemen who were joining, in quality of volunteers, the household of the Prince de Condé.

"You have come at the right time," Monsieur de Pomereux said to them; "the order has come this morning for us to set out. The king and princes will rejoin us at Compiégne. You will be taken for volunteers, and you will have nothing more to fear."

About two o'clock in the afternoon the procession set out. Belle-Rose and Cornelius rode beside Monsieur de Pomereux. Déroute and Grippard came behind. The route which they were following was filled with troops, carts, baggage, carriages, and cavaliers. They encountered squadrons ranged in long files, battalions stretched out like ribbons, and trains of heavy artillery. At sight of the cannons, Déroute became red with pleasure. He rode his horse up to one of the pieces, a beautiful cannon of *fleur-de-lis* bronze, and caressed with his hand its shining breech.

"If I were King of France," said he, "I should always have a dozen of them near me, all loaded, and from time to time I would make them play in order to have music."

The peasants came to the road in order to see the regiments and companies of gentlemen who were going to the war, beautiful, smiling, and decorated as if they were going to a ball. When they traversed villages, the whole population ranged themselves where the soldiers passed along. In the cities there was something more than this. The inhabitants took possession of them, and the next day there was to be seen on the cockade of the hats and the guard of the sword bouquets of flowers and knots of ribbon which recalled to the gentlemen their ephemeral loves of a night. In all this beautiful country of France, so well organized for war, this military attire awoke enthusiasm. The king and his household were at Compiégne. The lightning was about to burst through the cloud. When Monsieur de Pomereux and Belle-Rose reached the frontiers, Flanders was studded with bayonets. The army was being concentrated at Charleroi. When near Arras, Belle-Rose sought information of the officer in charge of the baggage as to the quarters of Monsieur de Luxembourg. The duke's lodging was on the side of Marchienne-le-Pont. Belle-Rose warned Cornelius and Déroute, and left during the night, after having said good-by to Monsieur de Pomereux.

"Good luck!" the count said to him, "if some misfortune should happen to you, think of me."

"Bah!" said Déroute, "we have the regiment of La

Ferté for us; Monsieur de Charny's men will not go so far as to rub against the artillery."

Along the route which they followed from Arras to Marchienne, the flowery plains were lit up by a thousand fires. In the silence of the night was to be heard the songs of the soldiers who were drinking in the bivouacs. Couriers passed at a gallop, carrying orders to divers corps, and in the midst of the shadows was to be seen silent regiments advancing over the plains like gigantic boa-constrictors. Monsieur de Luxembourg was in command of the army on the frontier. Order and activity reigned everywhere. The illustrious captain who was one day to succeed the Prince de Condé and the Vicomte de Turenne, and sustain the honor of the French flag, had established among the troops an exact and rigid discipline. Careless, irregular, voluptuous in his private life, he brought to the affairs of war a promptitude, a firmness which imposed respect and obedience. His glance had that clearness and that certainty which make great generals; his bravery equaled that of the Prince de Condé. If he had not yet accomplished those great things and gained those furious battles which were to carry his reputation so high, it had been seen, even in the first campaigns, that he had in him the germ of his brilliant qualities. He had the esteem of the chiefs and the confidence of the soldiers. In proportion as he advanced in the direction of Marchienne, the sight of the places recalled to Belle-Rose one of the most terrible episodes of his stormy life. He saw from the top of a hill the little pavilion where Genevieve had bade him such a sad farewell; and, upon a part of the bank washed by the Sambre, the lugubrious spot where Monsieur de Villebrais had uttered his three cries of agony. The old willow was still there, bathing its branches in the water. When Belle-Rose reached Marchienne-le-Pont, he found the residence of Monsieur de Luxembourg surrounded by officers and aides-de-camp. The day had just began, and its first rays had awakened the great hive where buzzed twenty thousand soldiers. Horses already saddled were prancing around the pickets. Monsieur de Luxembourg was expediting his dispatches. An order was necessary to reach him. Belle-Rose dismounted; Déroute did not have enough eyes for looking at the parks of artillery, the tents, the stacks of arms; a thousand wild exclamations came from his lips. He had just recognized three or four sub-officers who had served in the regiment of La Ferté, and was bubbling over with impatience. Just

as he was about to strike one of them on the shoulder an officer, followed by an orderly, came up at a gallop in the midst of the groups who surrounded the dwelling of the general. His face was joyous and animated.

"My brother!" exclaimed Belle-Rose.

"The colonel!" exclaimed Déroute.

At this double cry, Monsieur de Naucrais—for it was he—turned round, and at the same glance he recognized the sergeant and the captain.

"Belle-Rose!" exclaimed he, in his turn.

And leaping from his horse, he threw himself into the arms of Belle-Rose, who, from those of the colonel, passed into those of Pierre.

"At last!" said de Naucrais, "they have opened their claws!"

"That is to say that I have left them."

"Well, morbleu! you shall not return to them. The army is a place of exile."

"It is a paradise!" murmured Déroute.

Monsieur de Naucrais smiled as he looked at the sergeant.

"As to you," said he, "if some one comes to seek you, you have a halberd for defending yourself."

Monsieur de Naucrais and Belle-Rose passed into the apartment of Monsieur de Luxembourg. At the colonel's name, the general turned abruptly toward the door.

"Have you the order?" he exclaimed.

"I have it," answered Monsieur de Naucrais, drawing a dispatch from his coat; "you will soon have, monsieur le duc," he added, "twenty occasions to signal your courage against the enemies of the king and the kingdom; another presents itself now to signal your generosity. Here is an officer who claims your protection."

"Captain Belle-Rose!" exclaimed the duke.

And he ran to embrace the young man.

"You have sought my support, and my support shall not fail you," said he; "as I am the cause of the evil, it is my duty to repair it."

Belle-Rose wished to interrupt him; Monsieur de Luxembourg stopped him with a gesture.

"Certainly," said he, "I have done what I could; but since I have not succeeded, I have done nothing. The firing of the convent and the carrying off of Madame d'Albergotti caused my steps to fail when they were perhaps going to succeed. The king has seen in that incident an attack on religion, and you know his disposition on that score.

But the war is here, Belle-Rose; the sword can conquer everything."

"I shall try it," said Belle-Rose, with a proud smile.

"And the occasions will not fail you, friend Jacques," said the duke. "I have been told things about you which prove that your hand has not grown benumbed during peace. You are among us, stay here; the army is a great family, and all soldiers are brothers."

Monsieur de Luxembourg opened the dispatches which Monsieur de Naucrais had brought him; his eyes sparkled as he ran over them and his cheeks reddened.

"It is war! messieurs," he exclaimed, in a vibrating tone. "The king is passing his troops in review; as to us, we shall soon pass to the frontier."

When Belle-Rose and Monsieur de Naucrais went out, they found groups of officers waiting for them at the door. At the news of the war which was on the eve of bursting out, there were among these brave gentlemen a thousand cries of enthusiasm. The news spread over the camp like an electric spark, sowing intoxication everywhere; the soldiers placed their hats at the end of their bayonets and embraced each other. When evening came, fires were lit all along the line, and the camp presented the aspect of a great ant-hill of soldiers agitated by a nervous ardor. What Monsieur de Luxembourg had foreseen happened; the officers who had served in the same corps as Belle-Rose in 1668, welcomed him like a brother in arms and presented him to their new comrades. If needed, the captain would have found fifty swords for defending him and numberless tents for receiving him. The regiment of La Ferté, in which he had first served and gained his first grade, congregated around him, and displayed for him the liveliest affection. As to Pierre, he had not quitted Monsieur de Naucrais, who had attached him to his person. He had become corporal, then sergeant, and had a strong desire to become captain. At the end of an hour, Déroute came back, bringing with him a dozen sergeants, whom he had recruited among his old acquaintances.

"Our pardon is at the end of our swords," Belle-Rose said to him.

"Then we hold it," said Déroute, with a calm air.

This night the sergeant went to sleep under a cannon.

CHAPTER LI

THE RHINE.

The invasion of Holland, in 1672, was "a thunderbolt in a serene sky," to make use of the expression of the Chevalier Temple. A hundred thousand men abandon at the same time their cantonments in Flanders, and traversing the Sambre and the Meuse, penetrate the Low Countries. The army takes possession at first of Rhimberg, Orsoy, Wesel, and Burich, and drives before it the frightened enemy. Successes so rapid inflame the ardor of the officers; the submission of the country around Liege opens the way to the Republic; the army passes by Maestricht, the siege of which might have delayed the march of the troops, and pushes on farther. Grol had just fallen into the hands of Monsieur de Luxembourg, when on the 12th of June, King Louis XIV. in person arrived on the banks of the Rhine. The Prince de Condé was with him; the Duc de Luxembourg rejoined the great captain. The Rhine crossed, Issel was alone left between the king and Amsterdam.

Belle-Rose and Déroute had hastened, immediately after the capitulation of Grol, to gain the general quarters, where the presence of the king and the Prince de Condé attracted a great number of volunteers. From the heights of Sherewberg were to be discovered the course of the Rhine and the Issel, the Wellaw and the Bellaw; the isle was defended by the Fort de Schenck and covered by the Wahal, whose impetuous current sheltered it from all attack. The Prince of Orange had left upon the right bank of the Rhine one of his lieutenants, Montebas, with eight regiments divided into three camps, who guarded the passages from Fort de Schenck to Arnheim; one at Hussen, the other at Borgschott, and the third at Tolhus. Behind these three camps extended a sandy country, strewn with dykes and all cut up with hedges and ditches. Parties of cavaliers were constantly to be found upon the bank, spying on the operations of the French troops who had for introducing themselves into the heart of Holland only the space comprised between Arnheim and Fort de Schenck. During the night which preceded the arrival of the king Belle-Rose left his tent. But he did it with such extreme prudence that Déroute, who was sleeping in a corner, did not

hear him. When he was some steps from his tent, Belle-Rose took his horse by the bridle, swathed its feet with linen, and moved away from the camp. After he had passed the last sentinel, he left at a gallop in the direction of the river. The swathed feet of the horse struck the ground noiselessly. Upon the other bank were to be seen the fires of the Dutch bivouacs and in the midst of the silence of the night was to be heard the cries of the sentries who were answering each other. Belle-Rose rode his horse into the Rhine and slowly followed its windings and turnings. He had been gone from the camp three or four hours when a cannon-shot awoke the sergeant in surprise. Déroute opened his eyes and looked around him; there was no one in the tent except Grippard, who was snoring unconcernedly. Cornelius was with Monsieur de Naucrais. Another cannon-shot drew Déroute from his lethargic immobility; he bounded to his feet and rushed out of the tent. A dozen detonations which burst upon the other bank made him run in the direction of the Rhine, no longer doubting but what Belle-Rose had, for some uncertain enterprise, taken his way in that direction. As he approached the bank, he saw a man on horseback advancing toward him at a gallop. Déroute recognized Belle-Rose in spite of the night.

"Hey! captain!" he cried, "are you the cause of all that stir over the way."

"In faith, it is impossible," said Belle-Rose.

He had scarcely finished speaking, when a flash illuminated the Tower of Tolhus, and a ball demolished the trunk of a willow at twenty steps from them.

"Now I am certain of it," said Déroute, with a tranquil air. "Ah! my God," he added, "how wet you are; where the devil do you come from?"

"From the Rhine, apparently," replied Belle-Rose, wringing his cloak which was dripping water.

"The bath has not been without music, but I fail to see the use of it."

Belle-Rose smiled.

"When I was quite a child," said he, placing his hand upon the sergeant's shoulder, "my father often made me read in a great book in which all that which comes from the heart is written. In this book, there was a phrase which struck me at the time and which I have never forgotten since."

"What phrase?"

"This is it: 'Seek and you will find.'"

"Well, what does that prove?" asked Déroute, who was puzzling his mind to divine what connection there could be between Dutchmen and the old book in which Belle-Rose read.

"It proves that I have sought and that I have found."

Déroute, who was not extra bright when it came to parables, soon gave up trying to understand this one; Belle-Rose was neither dead nor wounded, and the rest in no wise concerned him. When they returned to the tent, Grippard was still sleeping. At the third cannon-shot he had opened his eyes for a moment, and had gone to sleep again, dreaming that he had heard a cricket. As soon as he had changed his clothing, Belle-Rose went to Monsieur de Luxembourg's. The next day the Prince de Condé had two batteries constructed and ordered a bridge of boats to be prepared. From the heights of Sherewberg Louis XIV. examined the enemy's position. While the artillery was being placed which was to protect the military operation, Monsieur de Luxembourg approached the Prince de Condé and spoke to him in a low tone for some moments. The prince let fall an exclamation of surprise.

"Is he a safe man?" he exclaimed all at once.

"Safe as myself," answered the duke.

"Well, let him try!" said the prince.

Belle-Rose was some steps away from the general officers, watching their interview. Upon a gesture from Monsieur de Luxembourg, he ran up.

"Here is Monseigneur le Prince de Condé who permits you to do what you wish," he said to him.

Belle-Rose saluted without replying and drew his sword.

"Eh! monsieur," added the prince, "it is a rather bold enterprise, and one which may cost, without result, the lives of many brave men. Do you wish to take some men with you?"

"Give me ten men, if you wish, my prince," answered Belle-Rose.

"You shall have twenty, and, if the thing is possible, believe that we will soon be at your side."

Belle-Rose rode rapidly away. Ten cuirasseirs of Monsieur Revel's regiment, ten volunteers of the gardes du corps and three or four officers of the prince's retinue followed him. Behind him came Cornelius, Déroute and Grippard. As they touched the shore, they encountered a troop of gentlemen, among whom was Monsieur de Pomereux. The young officer had donned his most beautiful uniform, hoping that there would be some fighting done.

"Where are you going?" exclaimed the count.

"Over there!" replied Belle-Rose, pointing out to him the Tower of Tolhus with the end of his sword.

"Do you wish to pass the Rhine?"

"Certainly."

"On horseback?"

"Parbleu!"

"But it is impossible!" exclaimed two or three gentlemen.

"Come first, and you will see."

"In fact, if it were easy, it would not be worth while trying it!" exclaimed the count.

"Let us go!" said the others, unsheathing.

Monsieur de Pomereux rode near Belle-Rose. The little troop threw itself into the water. Among them were Monsieur de Maurevert, Comte de Saulx, the Marquis de Thermes, the Duc de Coislin, the Prince de Marcillac, and several others of the first nobility of the kingdom. Upon the opposite shore they perceived three Dutch squadrons ranged in line of battle; in the tower of Tolhus, the cannoneers were at their pieces, with matches lighted. Scarcely had they made ten steps in the river, when Déroute struck himself on the forehead.

"Good!" he exclaimed, "it is a ford."

He had understood the parable.

"Well," Belle-Rose said to him, "do you believe that the Evangelist is right?"

The troop, which was composed of forty persons, advanced with bursts of laughter.

"If we die, we shall at least die gayly," said Monsieur de Pomereux.

The cuirassiers, more heavily armed, remained somewhat in the rear; the volunteers, ardent and well mounted, marched first. Sometimes the water came up to the girths of the saddles; sometimes it even reached the belts of the soldiers. Monsieur de Revel's squadrons ranged themselves upon the shore, ready to leave at the first signal.

Toward the middle of the river a cuirassier suddenly lost footing and disappeared with the current; a little later it was the turn of a garde du corps. Ten steps farther on the horse of a volunteer rolled over in the water, the river passed over them, and nothing more was seen of them.

"Forward!" cried Monsieur de Pomereux.

"Forward!" repeated the gentlemen, with swords raised.

"Eh!" said Grippard, "I believe that we are one against twenty, and they have the position in their favor."

"Advance first and count after; does that child in front of us think of it?" replied Déroute, pointing with his finger to the Chevalier de Vendome who was pricking his horse with his sword to make him swim more rapidly.

The Chevalier de Vendome was then seventeen years of age. Grippard was ashamed of his observation, and imitated the chevalier. At sight of that little troop which was advancing boldly against them, the three Dutch squadrons descended toward the river and entered the water up to their stirrups. At this moment the Prince de Condé made a sign, and Monsieur de Revel plunged into the Rhine at the head of the cuirassiers. The river was three-fourths crossed; the passage was no longer a problem.

"He is a valiant soldier, and if he is not killed, we will present him to the king," said the Prince de Condé to Monsieur de Luxembourg.

Belle-Rose and the brave young men who accompanied him were not frightened at the difference in numbers. Urging on their horses, they resolutely met the enemy with cries of, "*Vive le roi!*" Their pistols being wet, the sword alone remained to them; but they handled it like men of courage. For a moment one might have believed that this handful of men was going to be annihilated by those three squadrons. But there happened what often happens in these perilous circumstances—the audacity of one side intimidated the other. The Dutch fired a volley and disbanded at once. The horses' feet planted themselves upon the shore, and the forty cavaliers rushed upon the enemy. There was a hand-to-hand contest, and the mélée became terrible.

"We are between water and fire!" said Déroute, whose kindly face was red with joy.

"Well, we will sooner succeed in extinguishing one than in drinking the other," answered Monsieur de Pomereux, who charged in the very thick of the squadrons.

The Tower of Tolhus, which had disdained to fire upon Belle-Rose and his troop, opened fire upon Monsieur de Revel's cuirassiers, who were followed by two squadrons of Monsieur de Pilois and two others of Monsieur de Bligny. The balls and the mitraille spattered the water; at every moment a cavalier disappeared in the river. The horses pranced in the Rhine, lost footing, and fell into currents in which they were ingulfed; the ranks were broken, the cavaliers rode at hazard, with eyes upon the mélée taking place upon the opposite shore; the river was

covered with floating corpses, with wounded men who stretched their arms toward the sky, with abandoned flags, with horses which were struggling in the agony of death. The Chevalier de Sallas, struck by a ball, fell from his saddle and disappeared under the surface of the foaming Rhine; Comte de Nogent's horse, having fallen back upon its master, drew him into the abyss, and the current carried them both away. A ball kills the horse of a cornet of cuirassiers, Monsieur de Brasalay; the valiant young man leaps into the river and swims with one hand, carrying his standard with the other. Monsieur de Pomereux, who sees him, re-enters the river, aids him to gain the shore, and returns to the combat. Meanwhile the cuirassiers arrive one after the other; Monsieur de Revel, wounded and bleeding, animates the soldiers, rallies them and bears down upon the Dutch, who already broken and discouraged, scattered in all directions. Déroute had drank blood even to the guard of his sword. Belle-Rose rode straight on without faltering. Cornelius and Grippard smote hip and thigh. Monsieur de Naucrais had passed with Monsieur de Revel's cuirassiers, and in a bound had rejoined Belle-Rose. Monsieur de Pomereux pursued the fugitives, whom he struck with the handle of his sword.

"Eh! rascals! turn so we can see your faces," he cried, half serious, half laughing.

The Dutch rallied behind the hedges and palisades, which space Lieutenant de Montbas had occupied with infantry. The trumpet was sounded, and the soldiers, a moment dispersed, ranged themselves around their guidons. There were before the French squadrons four or five thousand men protected by numerous ditches and other means of defense; before attacking them, it would at least be necessary to place themselves in order of battle. The cannon of the batteries constructed upon the right shore of the Rhine shelled the Tower of Tolhus and protected the passage of the reinforcements. The Prince de Condé threw himself into a bark along with the Duc de Luxembourg, the Duc d'Enghien, and the Duc de Longueville; their horses swam behind them. Two entire regiments of cavalry had just entered the river. When the Prince de Condé and the gentlemen of his suite arrived upon the shore strewn with dead bodies, the squadrons of Messieurs de Revel, de Pilois, and de Bligny were in conflict with parties of the enemy who had left their entrenchments to sustain the fugitives. The Prince de Condé and the Duc de Luxembourg placed swords in their hands, and

as in the time when they made war together against Monsieur de Turenne in Flanders, they threw themselves upon the enemy. The fever of combat had seized them. When they were seen coming cries of enthusiasm rose from the ranks of the French cavaliers. The Chevalier de Vendome pounced upon a Dutch officer, killed him with a sword thrust, took his flag, and, armed with this trophy, continued his bold course; the Marquis d'Aubasson wished to follow him and fell, struck in the heart by a ball; the Duc de Longueville leaped over his dying body and placed himself in the first rank. Monsieur de Naucrais, Belle-Rose, Cornelius, and Déroute formed a wedge which opened the Dutch Army with the irresistible force of a battering-ram. Monsieur de Pomereux was everywhere at the same time, choosing his adversaries and improvising here and there duels in the midst of the combat. When a movement was made in any direction, Belle-Rose quitted his friends, ran where the danger was, and maintained the superiority acquired at the beginning of the action. He had at the same time the bravery of the soldier and the glance of the chief; he was followed with enthusiasm and obeyed with a blind confidence. The Tower of Tolhus soon ceased its fire; it was dismantled and conquered. The two batteries of the Prince de Condé turned their smoking cannon toward the plain, where the Dutch were to be perceived behind their hedges and palisades. The impulse was given; it was now beyond the power of the chiefs to stop it; to tell the truth, not one of them thought of it, and far from wishing to restrain their troops, they would have urged them on if there had been any need to do so. The princes of the blood themselves fought like officers of fortune. The presence of the Prince de Condé, of his son the Duc d'Enghien, of the Duc de Luxembourg, of the young Duc de Longueville, communicated an incredible ardor to the soldiers who had just so audaciously crossed the Rhine. No attention was paid to the musketry which decimated their ranks, and they arrived pell-mell at the barriers, the best mounted in front, the others behind. The Dutch officers had succeeded in re-establishing a little order among their troops, who imagined that the whole French army was upon them; the cavaliers, rallied behind the first ditch, made use of the pistol. A ball carried away Monsieur de Pomereux's hat, who saluted with his sword.

"Behold a lesson in politeness for which I must thank these gentlemen," said he, and applied a dig of the spur to his horse, who neighed with pain and leaped the ditch.

Thirty or forty gentlemen, among whom were the Prince de Condé and the Duc d'Enghien, fell sword in hand upon a body of Dutch cavaliers. These cavaliers welcomed them with musket-shots. Belle-Rose, just at the moment when the guns were lowered, threw himself before the Prince de Condé and shielded him with his body. The balls whistled, and Belle-Rose's horse, which he had forced to rear, was shot dead. Three or four gentlemen rolled from the saddle, and the sword escaped from the hands of the Prince de Condé. A stray ball had broken his arm. Near him, the Marquis de La Force fell under the feet of the horses. Belle-Rose picked up the Prince's sword and returned it to him.

"Give it to me!" exclaimed the prince, who seized it with his left hand, "and let us show this mob that steel is superior to lead."

Passing over the dead body of the Marquis de La Force, he charged the Dutch, who took to flight. At the end of fifty steps the barriers were reached, soldiers and gentlemen, conquerors and conquered, cavaliers and foot soldiers, being all mixed together. Monsieur de Naucrais had given his horse to Monsieur de Luxembourg, who had lost his. Déroute, seeing his two chiefs on foot, descended from the saddle. Monsieur de Pomereux, who had taken possession of a flag, fought by the side of the Duc de Longueville, and was half the length of a horse in advance of him. The young duke endeavored to reach the barrier before the count.

"At Versailles, I would give way to you, my dear duke," Monsieur de Pomereux said to him, "but we have left etiquette on the other side of the Rhine."

As he was speaking, the Dutch infantry took aim at the troop. At sight of that long file of glittering muskets, Déroute leaped like a lion upon Monsieur de Naucrais and Belle-Rose and bent them down with an irresistible force.

"Lower yourself!" cried he, in a thundering voice to the Comte de Pomereux, who was touching the palisades.

"A gentleman does not lower himself!" replied Monsieur de Pomereux.

Monsieur de Longueville had joined him, and they were proceeding in front. The discharge burst. A wind of death passed over the troop and caused the boldest to fall. Monsieur de Longueville and Monsieur de Pomereux's horses leaped the palisade, and the two brave young men, struck at the same time, rolled into the Dutch ranks. Belle-Rose and Monsieur de Naucrais rose in the midst of

a cloud of smoke and were the first to enter the barrier. The Dutch lost footing on all sides; many of them were left dead or wounded upon the square; the greater number surrendered. Two regiments of cavalry took possession of the enemy's abandoned camp. Monsieur de Luxembourg fixed his piercing glance upon the horizon, where, in the golden vapors of the evening, were to be seen the steeples of ten cities.

"Utrecht is ours," said he.

Meanwhile Belle-Rose, no longer seeing any enemies before him, retraced his steps. A group of gentlemen, blackened by powder and covered with blood, surrounded a litter, upon which rested a dead body. Among these gentlemen were the Prince de Condé, the Duc d'Enghien and the Chevalier de Vendome; the young chevalier wept like a child after having fought like a soldier, the Duc d'Enghien let great tears roll down his cheeks, and the Prince de Condé dried his eyes with a mutilated hand. The livid and blood-stained head of the Duc de Longueville rested upon a bed of flags. Upon his pale face was still to be seen the ardent and proud expression of his young courage. Death had surprised him at the moment of triumph. He had fallen, like an oak struck by the thunderbolt, at a single blow. Those among the gentlemen who were wounded raised themselves to say a last adieu to him whom the future surrounded with so many hopes and who was now but a lifeless form; the living formed for him a mournful and sad cortege. Belle-Rose suddenly recollected the cry of Déroute, and not seeing Monsieur de Pomereux among the officers of the prince, he was afraid. He rushed in the direction in which he had seen the count disappear in a cloud of smoke and fire, and found the sergeant sustaining Monsieur de Pomereux in his arms. A surgeon, whom Cornelius had gone to seek, was probing his wounds.

"Hey! come here," the count said to him, in a failing voice, "I feared to die without having pressed your hand."

When Belle-Rose was at his side, Monsieur de Pomereux repulsed the surgeon's hand.

"I am pierced through and through," he said to him; "you well know that there is no longer any hope; therefore, monsieur, do not worry any more."

The surgeon dried his instruments and went away without saying a word.

"That is an answer," said the count, with a smile.

He embraced Belle-Rose and Cornelius, extended his hand to Déroute and made ready to die. His head rested

upon a drum. The sun was sinking toward the horizon; rosy clouds floated in the luminous sky and were chased by a warm wind. Monsieur de Pomereux's eyes seemed to seek there a fugitive image; a sweet serenity was spread over his features; the reflection of a happy thought could be read upon them.

"It seems to me that death is an awakening," said he, "it unites those whom life has separated."

His eyes lost their luster; he murmured the name of Gabrielle and died. At this moment a thousand cries rose from all sides, the drums beat in the fields, the cavaliers shook their hats which were stuck to the ends of their swords and the clarions sounded. Louis XIV. was passing the Rhine.

CHAPTER LII.

A RAY OF SUNSHINE.

The Rhine was crossed. When night came, the French army camped upon the right shore; before it extended the great plains of Holland. Victory had crowned its first efforts. The soldiers, animated by the ardor of combat, grouped themselves around the bivouac fires and related to each other the incidents of this day. A crowd of officers thronged around the habitation of Louis XIV. In the intoxication excited by this passage, the glorious monarch already saw the presage of his entrance into Amsterdam. He did not know that between him and the old capital of Holland he would find William of Orange. The generals came to present their compliments to the king and to take his orders. The halls were filled with brilliant uniforms; the best gentlemen of France were there; some failed the reunion—these were dead. Everybody had traversed the Rhine, but no one yet knew how it had been passed. A man had thrown himself into the river, a company had followed him, then a regiment, then the army, and they had arrived, sword in hand, at the Dutch entrenchments.

"Do you know, messieurs, the name of the gentleman who found the ford?" said the king, addressing himself to the circle who surrounded him.

"Sire," replied Monsieur de Luxembourg, "it is an officer of your army; but this officer is not a gentleman."

"But," proudly answered Louis XIV., "if I call him thus, it is apparently because he ought to be one."

Monsieur de Luxembourg bowed.

"His name?" added the king.

"Belle-Rose."

"To what regiment does he belong?"

"To the regiment of La Ferté, artillery."

Louis XIV. meditated a moment.

"It is not," he resumed, presently, "the first time that I have heard this officer spoken of."

"No, sire, I have had the honor to converse with Your Majesty concerning an affair in which he is interested."

"Ah! I recollect! Is it not a question of the firing of a convent and the abduction of a nun?"

"No, sire. Persons who hate Belle-Rose because he is devoted to me have misrepresented facts to Your Majesty. Belle-Rose has delivered his *fiancee* who had been placed in a cloister against her will, and he has made her his wife as soon as she was free."

Louis XIV. knew admirably his trade of king; he posed eternally before the court, before Europe, and before himself. An occasion presented itself to accomplish an act of justice in favor of an officer who had bravely done his duty, and to whom the army owed its first victory; his pardon was then, take it all in all, an act of public reparation, emanating from the throne, and which made royalty play the role of Providence which rewards the good. Louis XIV. took advantage of the occasion.

"It is well," said he; "the officer who has fought so well under my eyes cannot be guilty. To-morrow you will bring him to us."

A flattering murmur traversed the circle of courtiers, and the king could read upon all faces the expression of a lively pleasure. Belle-Rose, warned by Monsieur de Luxembourg, held himself in readiness to appear before the king. It was the first time that he was going to find himself in the presence of a sovereign whose name filled Europe with fear, and if his heart did not beat much at the moment of a battle, it beat very strongly when he followed the duke to the royal residence. That air of majesty which Louis XIV. always wore dazzled Belle-Rose; he bent his knee and waited in a respectful silence.

"Rise, monsieur," the king said to him; "you conducted yourself well yesterday, and we wish, in order to reward your good services, that every trace of the past should be effaced. What you have been you are no more; you will know at Paris what I have made of you."

"At Paris!" exclaimed Monsieur de Luxembourg. "Does

Your Majesty recollect that Monsieur de Louvois hates Belle-Rose?"

"Perhaps you should have forgotten it, monsieur le duc, and only recollect what protects him," replied the king. "As to you, monsieur," added he, transferring his looks to Belle-Rose, "you are going to leave at once for Paris; I have charged you with informing Monsieur de Louvois of the first sucesses of our campaign. The dispatches will be sealed and handed you by an officer of our household. Go and return, monsieur; your place is among us."

No one in the kingdom could be more seducing and fascinating than Louis XIV. when he wished to be; grace and dignity were allied in him in an equal proportion, and he had naturally that nobility which lends value to the least things.

"Sire," exclaimed Belle-Rose, "you have returned to me that place in the army in which I have fought for Your Majesty; my life is yours."

An hour after this interview Belle-Rose received the dispatches and mounted a post-chaise, after having bade farewell to Monsieur de Luxembourg and Monsieur de Naucrais. Déroute was with him. Cornelius staid behind with Pierre. The rendezvous was before Utrecht. If Déroute had not been able to quit Belle-Rose, Grippard, on his side, had not been able to separate himself from Déroute. The latter was groom, the former was postilion; when they were together, there was no longer either corporal or sergeant; they were like shadow and body. They made great haste to cross the distance which extends from the banks of the Rhine to Paris. Though Belle-Rose returned there under conditions as excellent as he could wish for, he was seized by an invincible sadness, and though he made every effort to chase it away, it always returned to extend itself like a vail over his mind. The death of Monsieur de Pomereux counted for much in this sadness. That brave gentleman had given him so many proofs of a chivalric devotion, that Belle-Rose had conceived a sincere friendship for him. Nevertheless he did not recall that the death of Monsieur d'Assonville had filled him with such a great depression; he had experienced from it a profound and lasting grief, but not that sort of uneasiness which he could not surmount. He reached the point of thinking it a presentiment, and his melancholy increased. The firmest characters are subject to fits of depression which are inexplicable but nevertheless powerful. Belle-Rose, however, was one of those who sacrificed everything

to the accomplishment of a duty; he left St. Claire d'Ennery to his right and pushed straight on to Paris. The chaise, preceded by Déroute, entered the court of Monsieur de Louvois' hotel. Belle-Rose descended from it, and asked an usher to introduce him into the minister's presence.

"His Excellency is engaged with Monsieur de Charny," the usher said to him.

"Say, then, to His Excellency that it is on the part of His Majesty Louis XIV.," replied Belle-Rose.

At this sacred name the usher disappeared and returned soon after.

"Whom must I announce?" said he.

"Captain Belle-Rose."

At this name, Monsieur de Louvois trembled like a lion surprised in his lair.

"Captain Belle-Rose!" he repeated, covering the officer with his sparkling glance. "You are very imprudent, monsieur, to come here."

"I do not think so, monseigneur," said Belle-Rose, coldly.

"Have you lost your memory, and must I recall to you that we have an account to settle together."

"It would be more appropriate, I believe, to speak of the affair which brings me. Have you not been told, monseigneur, that I come on the part of His Majesty the King?"

Monsieur de Louvois frowned.

"The king is in Holland, monsieur," replied he.

"I come from there, monseigneur, and here are the dispatches which His Majesty has confided to me."

Belle-Rose drew the package from his pocket and handed it to the minister. Monsieur de Louvois, thoroughly astonished, took it without reply and opened it. Monsieur de Charny was standing in the embrasure of a window, silent and attentive. On reading the dispatch which announced the passage of the Rhine, the man gave way to the minister. Monsieur de Louvois rose with a radiant countenance.

"Holland is open!" he exclaimed, "ten cities conquered and the Rhine crossed in a month! The republic must be effaced from the rank of nations."

"You were at this passage, monsieur," resumed he, addressing himself to Belle-Rose.

"Yes, monseigneur."

"Emmerich and Retz are ours."

"Monsieur de Luxembourg has conquered them; the army is marching upon Utrecht."

"Utrecht will be taken."

"I know it."

"Of all Holland, only Amsterdam will be left."

"Amsterdam and William of Orange."

"They will be conquered, monsieur."

"I hope so, monseigneur."

Monsieur de Louvois spoke with enthusiasm, walking from one end of the room to the other; all at once he stopped before Belle-Rose; the expression of triumph slowly disappeared from his face. In his turn the minister gave way to the man.

"The affairs of the kingdom are ended; I imagine, monsieur, that we can pass to yours," said he.

"You have not read all, monseigneur," replied Belle-Rose, indicating with his finger a sealed paper which he had drawn from the dispatch.

Monsieur de Louvois broke the seal and ran over the paper. His face, just now purple-colored, became livid; he fell, rather than sat down, upon his fauteuil. Monsieur de Charny quitted the window and came to him.

"Read," the minister said to him.

Monsieur de Charny terminated his reading without his impassible countenance having expressed any emotion. While he was running over the dispatch, Monsieur de Louvois turned to Belle-Rose.

"Go, monsieur, into the other room," he said, in a voice trembling with anger; "in a moment you will see me."

Belle-Rose saluted and went out.

"Well!" exclaimed the minister, as soon as the door was closed.

"Well, we are conquered, monseigneur," said Monsieur de Charny.

"Colonel and vicomte with the title of Malzonvilliers! All the honors together!"

Monsieur de Louvois shivered from head to foot, and his lips were white.

"Why did you let him fly?" he exclaimed, suddenly and violently.

"This man is an eel, you know, monseigneur," replied Monseiur de Charny. "I have had him sought for at Paris, in the environs, everywhere; he had disappeared without leaving any trace. As to the army, it is an ocean."

"He has braved me to my face, I held him in my power, and he escapes me. She, too, escapes me."

"The marquise, of whom the king's good pleasure makes a vicomtesse—is she not still at St. Claire d'Ennery?"

"Were she in the middle of the Place Royale, the king's authority protects her."

"Oh, there is the chapter of accidents," replied Monsieur de Charny.

Monsieur de Louvois shivered; the manner in which his confidant pronounced these words gave them a clear and terrible sense.

"Certes, I can do nothing when it comes to chance," said the minister in a low tone.

A sinister smile lit up the face of Monsieur de Charny.

"It is a blind power," said the confidant, "and you are a clear-sighted minister."

"Vicomte de Malzonvilliers!" murmured Monsieur de Louvois, "colonel! master at present of the court's favor! This is indeed the king's handwriting. He wishes to push him and to charge himself with his fortune."

The minister read again five or six times the lines traced by the royal hand.

"Monsieur de Charny," said he, turning with an imperative air to the pale gentleman, "accident is powerless as to him."

"Powerless to-day," replied the favorite, coldly. "He is at your home."

Monsieur de Louvois rang and ordered Belle-Rose brought back.

"His Majesty wishes you well, monsieur, on account of your gallant conduct in Holland, and notably at the passage of the Rhine," the minister said to him. "You are a colonel; you must be impatient to carry this news to St. Claire d'Ennery, but before returning you your liberty, permit me to ask of you a new service."

"Speak, monseigneur."

"You have assisted at this last victory of His Majesty, you have even taken a great part in it; more than any other you are in position to draw up the statement which I propose to send to the governors of the provinces. It must leave soon; seat yourself there and begin."

Belle-Rose had no motive for refusing; he took the place indicated by Monsieur de Louvois, and prepared to write.

"Meanwhile," said the minister, "if you have some letter to address to your wife, write it, and it will be carried to her at once."

Belle-Rose accepted the proposition. While he was tracing some words in haste, Monsieur de Charny's eyes followed the rapid movements of his hand with a diabolical expression. When the letter was sealed, a strange

smile wandered over his lips. Monsieur de Louvois took the letter, and Monsieur de Charny went out. A moment after a lackey presented himself with Belle-Rose's note. Monsieur de Charny, who was watching in the anteroom, walked up to the lackey.

"Give me that letter; I charge myself with it," said he.

The lackey, who knew Monsieur de Charny, handed it to him without hesitation. Déroute and Grippard had remained in the court, waiting for the return of Belle-Rose. Déroute wore an air of triumph; he went and came with the pride of a captain in that court where some time previous he had wandered about under a thousand disguises. He would have willingly related the exploits of his master to every person he came across, and he looked people in the face with the air of a man who feels himself protected by the favor of the king. As to Grippard, he had sat down upon a block of stone and gone to sleep in the sunshine. An hour after Monsieur de Charny appeared in the court. Déroute still wore his triumphant air; from time to time he looked at Grippard and shrugged his shoulders, thinking him a man who had no sentiment of his dignity. At sight of Monsieur de Charny, Déroute frowned, but it seemed to him that this man thrice conquered was not worthy of his hatred, and he smiled with a magnificent air. Monsieur de Charny paid no attention to Déroute and leaped into a carriage which had been prepared for him.

"Barriére St. Denis," said he.

The team left at a rapid trot.

CHAPTER LIII.

THE RUE DE L'ARBRE-SEC.

Meanwhile, at the end of an hour or two's waiting, Déroute began to find the time very long. Belle-Rose's delay in reappearing seemed inexplicable to him; he made twenty times the tour of the court, awoke Grippard two or three times to distract himself, but Grippard had no sooner opened his eyes than he closed them again; finally, no longer restraining himself, he took the part of mounting himself to Monsieur de Louvois' apartments. An usher whom he questioned informed him that Belle-Rose was in the minister's cabinet engaged in writing the official statement of the passage of the Rhine. As he was coming down again, almost tranquillized, Déroute sud-

denly recalled the order which Monsieur de Charny had given on mounting within the carriage.

"The road to St. Denis," he thought, "is also the road to St. Claire d'Ennery."

Déroute's forehead grew somber.

"Has my master written anything?" he asked the usher.

"He has written a letter," answered a lackey, who was in the anteroom, and who was the same one whom Monsieur de Charny had stopped.

"Where is this letter?"

"Monsieur de Charny has taken it, telling me that he would charge himself with it."

Déroute frowned; Monsieur de Charny's face had, at the moment when that gentleman had mounted within the carriage, an expression of lugubrious gayety which the faithful servant recollected. Without knowing why, he was afraid, and soon his own emotion frightened him; he was a man, we know, who believed in presentiments and submitted to their influence. When he was in the court he no longer resisted his presentiment; he struck Grippard with his fist. Grippard, awakened in surprise, bounded to his feet.

"When Belle-Rose descends," said the sergeant, "you will tell him that I have left for St. Claire d'Ennery."

"What are you going to the abbey for?" replied Grippard, rubbing his eyes.

"I do not know, it is my idea."

Déroute procured himself a horse and set out. Monsieur de Charny had, as Déroute foresaw, pushed on in the direction of St. Claire d'Ennery. At St. Denis he changed horses and gave a gold louis to the postilion, for which he spurred the horses vigorously. At half a league from the abbey Monsieur de Charny alighted from the carriage. There was upon the side of the road a hut where wine and whisky were sold, and before the hut a kind of peasant who was pitching up sous and catching them in his hand. Monsieur de Charny went to him.

"Do you wish to gain two crowns?" he said to him.

"Three, if you permit it," replied the peasant, whose eyes shone.

"Come, then, and do what I tell you."

Monsieur de Charny took him to the carriage, drew from it a basket enveloped in fine linen and brought forth from his pocket Belle-Rose's letter.

"You know where the Abbey of St. Claire d'Ennery

is?" said Monsieur de Charny, with his eye upon the peasant.

"Very well, since I often carry vegetables and milk there."

"Then you are known there?"

"Perfectly."

"You are going then to carry this letter there, and as quickly as you can."

"That is not difficult, the distance is short and I have long legs."

"If you are questioned, answer that the basket and letter have been brought by a valet whose horse has fallen before your door."

"Very well."

"I have promised you two crowns——"

"I have understood three," interrupted the rascal.

"You will have four if you return in a quarter of an hour."

"I shall fly there."

In eight or ten minutes the peasant, who had taken a cut across the fields, reached the door of the abbey. The touriére opened the door, the peasant handed her the basket and letter, which were both to Suzanne's address, and as she was accustomed to seeing him, he went away without being questioned. At the end of a quarter of an hour Monsieur de Charny saw him coming back.

"It is done!" exclaimed the young peasant.

"Here is your money," replied Monsieur de Charny, whose eyes shone with joy.

He remounted within his carriage and took up again the route to Paris. As he reached Franconville, Déroute, riding at full speed, passed like an arrow by the side of the carriage. Monsieur de Charny leaned out at the portiére, following with his eye the whirlwind of dust which mounted from under his horse's feet.

"He will arrive too late this time," murmured he, when he had lost sight of him.

Déroute blindly obeyed the secret influence which pushed him on; the rapidity of his course, instead of diminishing his ardor, augmented it. He was about to pass before the house where Monsieur de Charny had stopped, when the strap to which the stirrup was attached broke. Déroute retained his horse's bridle and dismounted. The peasant was still at his door, but this time he was pitching up crowns instead of sous.

"If it is a commission which you have for the Abbey of St.

Claire," said he to the sergeant, "you can give it to me while you are fixing your stirrup; I come from there, I will return there."

"You have been to the abbey?" exclaimed Déroute, who, in his present situation of mind, attached importance to the least things.

"And it has brought me in twenty-four livres," said the rascal, pitching up the white pieces.

Déroute took the peasant by the collar.

"What were you doing at the abbey?" he exclaimed.

"In faith," said the frightened rogue, "I carried there a basket and a letter on the part of a gentleman who had come in a carriage."

"A pale little gentleman dressed in black?"

"Precisely, and he left again as soon as the commission was executed."

"And do you know what was in this basket?"

"It appeared to me that it contained flowers and fruits; there came from it a delightful perfume."

"Flowers and fruits, did you say?"

"It must have been some gallantry shown by this gentleman to some nun."

Déroute released the peasant, pulled off the saddle, remounted his beast bareback, and flew at headlong speed toward the abbey. The touriére was frightened on seeing him pale as a corpse and let him pass without saying a word. The basket and letter had been received by Madame de Châteaufort, who had amused herself by untying the linen, while some one had gone to inform Suzanne. She found under the white vail the most beautiful flowers and fruits of the season. Genevieve took an orange and opened it. She had recognized Belle-Rose's handwriting and did not doubt but what the present came from him. Suzanne was at this moment at the other end of the garden with Claudine and the two children; nearly an hour passed before she could be found. When she came up she unsealed Belle-Rose's letter, pale and trembling with emotion.

"Oh, my God!" she exclaimed, "he is victorious and free! He has seen the king, and the king has made him colonel!"

A stream of tears escaped from Suzanne's eyes, and she embraced Genevieve and Claudine. Genevieve began to feel an intolerable warmth in her breast; but joy made her forget her pain. The basket of flowers and fruits was upon a piece of furniture near by. A ray of sunshine through the open window fell upon them, covering them with a golden light. Suzanne caressed them with her eyes

and hand; she took a bunch of roses and scented them; a splendid fruit followed the roses, and she was already carrying it to her lips when the door opened violently. Déroute, frightened and dusty, appeared upon the threshold; in a bound he had reached Suzanne, snatched the fruit from her hands, and sent it through the window.

"My God! what is the matter with you?" exclaimed Suzanne.

Déroute, without answering, overturned the basket.

"Do not touch it!" he finally exclaimed; "this cursed basket comes from Monsieur de Charny."

This terrible name caused fright to pass into the soul of Suzanne. Genevieve grew horribly pale and fell to her seat. Claudine, who noticed it, rushed to the abbess.

"Oh! how I suffer!" she exclaimed, with her hands clasped to her breast.

Suzanne and Claudine felt chilled to the heart.

"Water, give me water," repeated Genevieve; "my body is on fire."

Her face became livid. Déroute saw upon the floor the rind of an orange and understood all.

"She is poisoned!" said he.

Madame de Châteaufort heard him.

"Send for Gaston!" exclaimed the poor mother, who felt herself dying.

Her features changed rapidly, she already had the leaden eyes and hollow cheeks of a woman who has been devoured by fever for ten days. A physician was called, and at the first word he confirmed the fears of Déroute. Genevieve was poisoned; the evil had made irreparable progress; the most energetic remedies could scarcely prolong life for some hours. The duchess received the news with a profound calm.

"A victim was necessary," said she, "God has chosen me; God punishes those whom he loves."

While these things were taking place at St. Claire d'Ennery, Belle Rose was finishing the report concerning the passage of the Rhine at Tolhus. Monsieur de Louvois was alone and delivered to the serious meditations which solitude gives birth to. His damned soul, the pale and lugubrious Monsieur de Charny, was no longer there; the thoughts of the minister, a moment excited by the somber words of that gentleman, had taken an austere course. Before his eyes was displayed the letter of Louis XIV., his looks could not detach themselves from it, and it seemed to him that the characters were of fire. The king had

taken Belle-Rose under his protection, and the king, Monsieur de Louvois knew, did not like for any one to interpose himself between him and his will. Monsieur de Louvois asked himself if it was worth while to expose himself to a dangerous struggle for the slender pleasure of following his vengeance against a man who, take it all in all, was in the right, and if it would not be greater, more worthy, and above all more politic to abjure his projects, for the future useless and perilous. He recollected that before all things, and in the high position in which events and his genius had placed him, he ought to be a statesman. Monsieur de Louvois passed his hand over his grave and burning forehead, drank some water, and with that strength of will which was peculiarly his, enchained his hatred in the depth of his heart. Belle-Rose had finished. The minister read the statement and nodded approval.

"You have been modest as well as brave," he said to him, "it is for me to repair your omissions, and I will do it like a man who has been your enemy. Go, monsieur le vicomte; you are a soldier and I am a minister; let each of us serve his king according to his strength and his conscience. Give me your hand, and believe me that you will no longer find me between you and fortune."

Belle-Rose took the hand which the minister extended to him and moved away, if not captivated by the man, at least full of admiration for the minister whose firm genius commanded everything, even his passions. Meanwhile Belle-Rose had left Paris toward evening. In haste to see Suzanne again, and disturbed about Déroute's absence, he went at a rapid pace. Night had come—a summer night, clear and starry. When the carriage had passed beyond Pontoise, he heard the funeral bell tolling in the midst of the deep silence. The bronze voice came from the direction of St. Claire d'Ennery, from that abbey where he had left all that which attached him to the world. A cold sweat bathed the temples of Belle-Rose, and he ordered Grippard to apply the whip to the horses. The carriage rolled rapidly on. The funeral knell buzzed in the ears of Belle-Rose. This voice of death in the midst of these tranquil plains congealed the blood in his veins. When he was near the abbey he saw, through the open doors nuns praying in the chapel and the silent crowd thronging under the somber vault. Belle-Rose entered the abbey, not knowing what new misfortune threatened him. When the door opened and he saw Genevieve stretched out upon her bed, immovable and white, Belle-Rose understood every-

thing. Genevieve had one hand upon Gaston's head and with the other was pressing a crucifix to her lips. At sight of Belle-Rose, she raised herself. She made a sign to Suzanne to approach, and took her hand which she joined to that of Belle-Rose between hers. Her eyes shone with a supernatural splendor, and as she saw tears in the eyes of Belle-Rose, she said to him, with the smile of a martyr:

"Do not weep; it is the end of the expiation."

She leaned toward Suzanne and passed her arm around the young woman's neck.

"I am going to die," she said to her. "Gaston will no longer have a mother; be that to him."

All her soul appeared in her eyes. She drew forward the sobbing child and placed him between Suzanne and Belle-Rose. And then having embraced all three turn by turn, she fell back, dead. Those who loved her remained all night praying around the funeral bed. Never had so great a grief torn the heart of Belle-Rose. Genevieve's body was exposed in the chapel for three days. When the funeral ceremony was over, Belle-Rose took with him Suzanne, Claudine, and the two children, and brought them back to the lodge which they occupied in the park before his departure, and during the whole day they were sad and silent. Déroute and Grippard themselves, who formerly did not have enough tongue to say all that was passing in their heads, remained mute. Toward evening, just as Suzanne was going to quit the apartment, Belle-Rose took her in his arms and kissed her on the forehead. He was grave and meditative.

"Go," he said to her, "and seek some repose. To-morrow, at daybreak, I will take you back to the hotel in the Rue de Rohan, you and Claudine. Your place is for the future at Paris.

"And yours, Jacques?" replied Suzanne.

"Mine is in the army so long as I have strength left to hold a sword. I shall go to rejoin Monsieur de Luxembourg and Monsieur de Naucrais, and with me I will take Gaston."

"What! a child so young?" exclaimed the mother.

The child raised his blonde face and turned to Belle-Rose his great, black eyes, in which shone a ray of joy.

"I am a soldier's son," said he, in a limpid and sonorous voice.

The day was dying, and already huge shadows floated over the country. Suzanne and Claudine retired with the two children. At the moment when his wife and sister

passed the door Belle-Rose made an imperceptible sign to Déroute, who was going out also. Deroute remained alone with Belle Rose. The sergeant looked at the colonel with an indefinable sentiment of curiosity. He had never seen him so calm and so terrible; his features had the rigidity of marble.

"Is Grippard here?" asked Belle-Rose.

"He is down below, with the horses."

"He must come up."

Grippard was called and at once made his appearance.

"My old comrade and you, Grippard, are going to follow me."

"At once," they answered, together.

"You will do what I tell you?"

"Without hesitation."

"Then take your swords and pistols."

"We have them."

"Saddle the horses and let us start."

Grippard ran to the stable, Déroute took the cloaks and they quitted the abbey as noiselessly as they could. The night was black, sad, and full of sinister noises as at the hours when a storm is brewing on the horizon. Once again they crossed that route which Belle-Rose had traversed so often already and under circumstances so diverse. None of the three cavaliers spoke. Belle-Rose rode in front, firm, implacable, and rapid as destiny. They entered Paris; upon the colonel's order, Déroute knocked at the door of a haberdashery. He took three masks, and each of them tied one upon his face. The horses were left in an inn, and the three soldiers plunged into the city.

"It is here," said Belle-Rose, when they had arrived before Monsieur de Louvois hotel.

Leaning against a somber wall, they waited a long time, immovable as blocks of stone. Shortly after midnight a carriage left the court; it was drawn by two horses and driven by a coachman; there was a lackey in front with a torch. This carriage was of a somber color and bore no escutcheon upon its panels. When about to pass the porte cochére, a man lowered a window and showed his pale face.

"To Voisin's!" said he.

This man was Monsieur de Charny.

Belle-Rose took up his position behind the carriage and followed it. Déroute and Grippard were close upon his heels. The state of the streets and the profound obscurity did not permit the equipage to advance very quickly. Belle-Rose and his two companions, accustomed to all the

exercises of the body, did not lose sight of it. They arrived together behind St. Germain l'Auxerrois, Rue de l'Arbre-Sec. The street was deserted and somber; Belle-Rose finding the place propitious to his design, rushed forward and leaped in a bound to the portière of the carriage which he opened. Déroute had placed his hand upon the horses' bits; Grippard had charged himself with the lackey. Everything stopped at the same time.

"Whip the horses!" cried Monsieur de Charny.

"Whip, and you are a dead man," replied Déroute, showing a pistol to the coachman.

The lackey, who was a resolute fellow, plunged his spurs into the horse's stomach, and struck Grippard on the head with a kind of hunting-knife which he carried in his belt. The corporal's hat parried the attack, and he replied by a thrust which entered the lackey's body; the man fell under the feet of the horse, which reared frantically. Grippard let go the reins, and the frightened animal left at a gallop. The whip escaped the hands of the terrified coachman. The stopping of the carriage and the fall of the groom had occupied the space of ten seconds. Monsieur de Charny looked at this great black figure which had so brusquely risen before him; but the face was masked, and through the holes in the mask he saw only two eyes whose flashing fire made him start.

"If it is gold that you wish," said he, affecting to laugh, "here is my purse."

Belle-Rose took the purse and scattered the gold on the ground. Monsieur de Charny shivered; a secret instinct told him that he was in the presence of a terrible danger.

"But what do you wish, then?" he exclaimed.

"Your life."

Monsieur de Charny collected all his somber energy for braving his enemy face to face.

"Pardon me, monsieur," he replied, "I took you for a robber, and you are an assassin."

Belle-Rose grew pale under his mask at this insult.

"Each of us has his sword," he coldly said. "Descend, monsieur."

Monsieur de Charny descended. They were at the corner of the Rue de l'Arbre-Sec and the Rue des Forses-St. Germain-l'Auxerrois; not a light shone at the windows of the neighboring houses, not a voice was heard in the silence. The coachman was upon his seat, mournful and stiff like a petrified corpse; the groom was gasping for breath upon the ground; the scene was lit up by a torch

which Grippard held in one hand, in the other sparkled a naked sword. Déroute had cut the horses' reins and was waiting for an order to act.

"Monsieur," exclaimed Monsieur de Charny, "there must be some mistake. I do not know you."

"You will know me when one of us is stretched out upon the ground."

"But it is a trap."

"It is a duel."

"And if I do not wish to fight?"

"You are the master as to that, but you will die more surely and more quickly."

Belle-Rose called Déroute with a sign of his head, and drawing forth his watch, he looked at it in the red light of the torch.

"You have three minutes in which to decide," said he; "at the third if you are not ready, this man will blow out your brains with a pistol as he would kill a venomous beast."

Déroute took a pistol from his belt and loaded it. Monsieur de Charny felt chilled to the marrow of his bones. He waited two minutes; the silence was so profound that one could hear the creaking of the weather-cocks upon the roofs. The coachman held to his seat with both hands to keep from falling. At the third minute, Monsieur de Charny drew his sword.

"I am ready, monsieur," said he.

Through his fright, a sudden idea had come to reanimate his failing courage. Now he no longer feared to die; he believed that he would conquer. Belle-Rose put himself on guard, Grippard approached, raising the torch. Déroute shoved his pistol back in his belt, and the two blades were crossed. Monsieur de Charny displayed, from the very first, all the finesse of his sword-play; confidence had nerved his hand and augmented his resources; but of his sword Belle-Rose made a cuirass; everywhere steel encountered steel. It was plain that each of the duelists wished to kill his adversary. Their feet seemed glued to the soil, and their swords, rapid and flexible, were interlaced like luminous serpents. Monsieur de Charny's left hand rested upon his hip, but it glided by an imperceptible movement toward his trousers pocket. All at once, and after a thrust and parry by Belle-Rose, which stained with some drops of blood the gentleman's sleeve just above the elbow, this hand reappeared armed with a pistol. The weapon was raised and the shot fired; but Belle-Rose,

more prompt than lightning, threw himself to one side, and the ball, grazing his breast, traversed the soldier's left arm.

"Traitor!" he exclaimed, and, rapid as a thunderbolt, he pounced upon Monsieur de Charny.

Nothing could stop the impetuosity of his onslaught; this time the hand was of iron as well as the sword; the first thrust was like a ball and traversed the gentleman's breast near the heart; the second pierced his throat through and through. Monsieur de Charny opened his arms and fell. Belle-Rose leaned over, and snatching off his mask, showed his naked face.

"You have poisoned Genevieve de Châteaufort," he said to him; "die, then, and be cursed."

An expression of profound horror and mad rage contracted Monsieur de Charny's face; a last blasphemy expired upon his bloody lips, a shiver seized him, and he died.

"She is avenged," said Belle-Rose, "let us leave."

They remounted their horses at the inn where they had left them, and regained St. Claire d'Ennery. The day was beginning to dawn when they reached the abbey, and the country awoke all shining with that enchanting decoration which the summer lavishes on everything; the dew trembled on the branches of the hedges, and the birds sang in the foliage. Suzanne was waiting in a mortal inquietude; she had been told of Belle-Rose's absence, and was ignorant of the cause of it. When she perceived him, she ran to him with a pale face, but with her eyes already smiling.

"What! blood!" she exclaimed, when Belle-Rose had opened his cloak.

"It is nothing," replied the soldier, in a deep voice; "I have just killed a serpent."

(THE END.)

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